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ESSAYS  
IN  
ENGLISH LITERATURE  
1780-1860

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ESSAYS  
IN  
ENGLISH LITERATURE

1780-1860

BY  
GEORGE SAINTSBURY  
||

*SECOND SERIES*

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## PREFACE.

THE Essays contained in this volume are devoted to the same period, and for the most part observe the same style of composition, which furnished forth the first series published under the same title five years ago by Messrs Rivington, Percival & Co. Like the majority of those, the majority of these appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine*; and I owe thanks to the publishers and editor thereof for their kind permission to reproduce them, as I do to Messrs Chapman & Hall for the essay on Miss Ferrier. That on Madame D'Arblay has not previously made its appearance in print.

I need say no more about the purport and purpose of these essays than that, as has

been more fully explained before, they are attempts to fill in the literary map of the period, on one coherent critical scheme, and with constant reference implied, if not expressed, to other periods and other literatures. If any very precise person should object that the Essay on *English War Songs*, and the first two of those on *Historical Novels*, contain references to literature which is neither English nor of 1780-1860, I can only reply that the central figure of the first is one of the chief English literary figures of that period, and that the historical novel in a perfect form is perhaps the most notable and characteristic of its special products.

The original dates and places of appearance of the essays, except that on Madame D'Arblay, are as follows: Miss Ferrier, *Fortnightly Review*, February 1882; Twenty Years of Political Satire, *Macmillan's Magazine*, March 1890; Hood, *do.*, September 1890; English War Songs, *do.*, May 1891;



Cobbett, *do.*, December 1891; Some Great Biographies, *do.*, June 1892; Landor, *do.*, February 1893; Three Humourists, *do.*, December 1893; The Historical Novel, *do.*, August - October 1894; Southey, *do.*, February 1895.

As some of the essays deal with more subjects than one, the exact chronological order of the first series could not here be observed: and I have arranged them so as best to obtain contrast of subject.



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## I.

### ROBERT SOUTHEY.

NEARLY seventy years ago Macaulay expressed a doubt whether Southey's poems would be read in half a century, but was certain that, if read, they would be admired. The doubt has been certainly justified; the certainty may seem more than a little doubtful. Southey's character, which was once subjected to the most unjust, though not perhaps the most unintelligible or inexcusable, obloquy, has long been cleared; and those who most dislike his matured views in political and ecclesiastical matters are the first to admit that few English men of letters have a more stainless record. His prose style, the merits of which were indeed never denied by any competent judges, has won more and more praise from such judges as time went on. But he is less read than ever as a whole, and his poems are the least read part of him. These poems, which the best critics of his own generation admired, if not without

reserve in detail, without any misgiving on the whole ; on which he himself counted, not in boastfulness or in pique, but with a serene and quiet confidence, to make him as much exalted by the next age as he thought himself unduly neglected by his own ; which Landor admired to enthusiasm and many others to warmth, while they extorted a grudging tribute even from the prejudice of Byron,—now find hardly any readers, and still fewer to praise than to read. Even among the few who have read them, and who can discern their merits, esteem rather than enthusiasm is the common note, and esteem is about the most fatal sentiment that can be accorded to poetry.\*

It is of the prose rather than of the verse that Macaulay's prognostication has been thoroughly fulfilled. *The Life of Nelson* represents it a little less forlornly, but with hardly less injustice than

\* Since I wrote this essay, a selection, the advent of which was quite unknown to me when the essay itself was begun, has been published by Messrs Macmillan, under the very competent editorship of Prof. Dowden, who had already done good work for Southey by his biography in the *English Men of Letters* series, and by editing his letters to Caroline Bowles. Naturally Prof. Dowden's selection is not quite identical with that which I should myself have made : and, in particular, while it gives more space to some of the longer poems than I should, it exhibits Southey's grotesque verse rather less freely than is, I think, desirable. But it is an excellent introduction to a mass of poetical work far too long neglected, and one which ought to do a great service to Southey's memory.



*The Battle of Blenheim* and one or two other things represent the verse in the SOUTHHEY. public memory. The stately quartos of *The History of Brazil* and *The Peninsular War*, the decent octavos of *The Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society* and *The Book of the Church*, the handy little duodecimos of *Espriella* and *Omniana*, with all the rest, have to be sought in catalogues and got together, not indeed with immense research (for none of them is exactly rare) but with some trouble and delay. In any other country a decent, if not a splendid, complete edition would long ago have enshrined and kept on view work so admirable in style always, frequently so excellent in mere substance, so constantly enlivened with flashes of agreeable humour or hardly less agreeable prejudice, and above all informed by such an astonishing knowledge of books. Johnson may have been fitted to grapple with whole libraries; but Southey did grapple with them, his industry being as notoriously untiring as the great Lexicographer's was notoriously intermittent.

Even in the article of biography the same malign, and to some slight degree mysterious, fate has pursued him. His life was extremely uneventful; but, except for the great catastrophe of Sir Walter's speculative career, it was not much more uneventful than Scott's. He was a delightful, though a somewhat too copious letter-writer, he

knew at all times of his life some of the most interesting people of the day, and scanty as were his means he was <sup>SOUTHEY.</sup> a very hospitable host and an untiring cicerone in a country flooded every year with tourists. But he was as unlucky in his biographers as Scott and Byron were lucky. Cuthbert Southey appears to have been an excellent person of good taste and fair judgment, but possessed of no great literary skill in general, and of no biographical genius in particular; while he had the additional disadvantage of being the youngest child, born too late to know much of his father, or of his father's affairs during earlier years. Dr Warter, Southey's son-in-law, had more literary ambition than Cuthbert; but he was deficient in judgment and in the indispensable power of selecting from the letters of a man who seems often to have written much the same things to three or four correspondents on the same day. The result is that, though the *Life and Correspondence* is a charming book as a book, with portraits and frontispieces showing the dead and delightful art of line-engraving at its best, and though both it, the *Selected Letters* and the *Letters of Southey to Caroline Bowles* are full of interest, that interest is so frittered and duplicated, watered down and wasted in the eleven volumes, that only patient and skilled extractors can get at it. An abridgment, putting the life together in Southey's own words, has, I believe, been executed

and by no incompetent hand ; but there is always

SOUTHEY. a curse on abridgments. And besides, the charm of a biography consists hardly more in the actual autobiographic matter, found in letters or otherwise, than in the connecting framework. It is because Boswell and Lockhart knew how to execute this framework in such a masterly fashion that their books possess an immortality which even the conversations of Johnson, even the letters of Scott, could not have fully achieved by themselves.

Southey, for whose early years there is practically no source of information but an autobiographic fragment written rather late in life, and dwelling on detail with interesting though rather disproportionate fulness, was born in Wine Street, Bristol, on the 12th of August 1774. His birthday gave him, according to an astrological friend, "a gloomy capability of walking through desolation," but does not seem to have carried with it any sporting tendencies. At least his only recorded exploit in that way is the highly eccentric, and one would think slightly hazardous, one of shooting wasps with a horse-pistol loaded with sand. His father, also a Robert, was only a linendraper, but the Southey, though, as their omnilegent representative confesses, "so obscure that he never found the name in any book," were Somerset folk of old date and entitled to bear arms. They had moreover actual wealth in the possession of one of their members, the poet's uncle, John Cannon



Southey, and expectations in the shape of estates entailed upon them in default of the male heirs of Lord Somerville. SOUTHEY.

Southey, however, never benefited by either, for his uncle's fortune went out of the family altogether, and it turned out that Lord Somerville had somehow got the entail barred. His father too failed and died early, and all the family assistance that he ever had came from the side of his mother, Margaret Hill, who was pretty well connected. Her half-sister, Miss Tyler, extended a capricious and tyrannical protection to the boy in his extreme youth (turning him out of doors later on the score of Pantisocracy and Miss Fricker), while her brother, Mr Hill, a clergyman, was Southey's Providence till long after he reached manhood. After a childhood (unimportant though interesting to read about) in which he very early developed a passion for English literature, he was sent by his uncle to Westminster in the spring of 1788, and remained there with not much intermission till it was time for him to go to Oxford.

This latter translation, however, was not effected without alarms and excursions. Although Southey, neither as boy nor yet as man, was the kind of person thoroughly to enjoy or thoroughly to profit by a public school, he was on the whole loyal to his own, and it produced a valuable and durable impression on him. The coarser and more hackneyed advantage of "making friends" he had to the uttermost ; for it was there that he made



the acquaintance of Charles Watkin Williams

SOUTHEY. Wynn, who was through life his patron  
as well as his friend, and of Grosvenor

Bedford, his constant correspondent and intellectual double. He also profited as much as need be in the matter of education, though, as has happened with other boys who have gone to school with more general information than solid instruction, he was promoted rather too rapidly to become a thorough scholar in the strict sense. Nor did some rough experiences in his early days do him much, if any, harm.

But the end of his stage was in a way unfortunate. Nothing could have less resembled the real man than his enemies' representation of him as a supple and servile instrument, keen to note and obstinate to seize the side on which his bread was buttered, and born to be a frequenter of "Mainchance Villa." As a matter of fact he was always an uncompromising and impracticable idealist, though with some safeguards to be noticed presently. In his last days at school he showed this quality just as he did twenty or forty years later, when he constantly struggled to write in *The Quarterly Review* as if he were sole proprietor, sole editor, and sole contributor thereof, just as he did when the heat of his Jacobinism was not at fullest, by "declining to drink Suwarrow," just as he did after he had thoroughly rallied to the Party of Order by refusing, in spite of the personal instances of the Duke of Wellington, to alter a judgment in his

*Peninsular War.* It is needless to say that in his time, as earlier and later, any Westminster boy of ability rather <sup>SOUTHEY.</sup> above the average and of tolerable character and conduct, had his future made plain by the way of Christ Church or Trinity as the case might be. But Southey must needs start a periodical called *The Flagellant*, whereof the very title was in the circumstances seditious, and in an early number made a direct attack on corporal punishment. This arousing the authorities, he confessed and expressed contrition ; but the head-master, Dr Vincent, was implacable, and not only insisted on his leaving the school, but directly or indirectly caused Dean Cyril Jackson to refuse to receive him even as a commoner at Christ Church.

He fell back, however, upon Balliol, and matriculated without demur in November 1792, going into residence in January. Perhaps, indeed, though his fortunes were now entering on a rather prolonged low tide, this particular ill luck was, even from the lowest point of view, not such very bad luck after all. At Christ Church even as a commoner, much more as a junior student, under such a Dean as Jackson, who bore the sword by no means in vain, a youngster of Southey's tone and temper, full of Jacobinism and all its attendant crazes, would have come probably, and rather sooner than later, to some signal mischance, even more decided and damaging to his prospects than the close of his Westminster career. At Balliol,

though he was in no particularly good odour,

SOUTHEY.

they seem to have left him very much alone, not resenting even the shocking innovation of his wearing his hair uncropped and unpowdered in hall. His tutor, with perhaps more frankness than sense of duty, said to him, "Mr Southey, sir, you won't learn anything by my lectures; so if you have any studies of your own, you had better pursue them." This he did by getting up at five o'clock in the morning to breakfast (one shudders to hear) on "bread and cheese and red wine negus," walking all over the country, learning to swim and to row, and associating chiefly with men of his old school. He seems to have kept terms or not with a casualty somewhat surprising even in that age of lax discipline and few or no examinations; and after about a year and a half of this sort of thing, he ceased to reside at all. It is scarcely surprising that he should have felt very little affection for a place where he stayed so little and sat so loose; and long afterwards he notes that, though he was constantly dreaming of Westminster, he never dreamed of Oxford.

In fact he was busy with thoughts and schemes quite alien from the existing scheme, or indeed from any possible scheme, of the university. He had made the acquaintance of Coleridge; his boyish friendship with the Miss Frickers had ripened into an engagement with one of them, Edith; he had, though the atrocities of the Terror



had much weakened his Gallomania, written *Joan of Arc*, and he had plunged ardently into the famous schemes of "Pantisocracy" and "Aspheterism." Of these much has been heard, though I never could make out, why, of these two characteristic specimens of Estesian language, Pantisocracy should have secured a place in the general memory which its companion has not. As Coleridge's many biographers have made known, Pantisocracy, a scheme for a socialist colony in Pennsylvania or Wales or anywhere, broke down; and it pleased Coleridge to consider that the blame was mainly Southey's. As a matter of fact it was impossible to start it without money, of which most of the Pantisocrats had none, and the others very little; and no doubt Southey who, visionary as he still was, had some common sense and a very keen sense of what was due to others, saw that to attempt it would be cruel and criminal. While Coleridge had been ecstatically formulating his enthusiasm in such sentences as "America! Southey! Miss Fricker! Pantisocracy!" his more practical friend was inquiring of Mr Midshipman Thomas Southey, his brother, "What do your common blue trousers cost?" Alas! when a man combines even an enthusiastic love for Aspheterism with a sense of the cost of common blue trousers, the end cannot be doubtful.

If, however, anybody imagined (and indeed the manufacturers of "Mr Feathernest" did try to set

up such a notion) that Southey relinquished his generous schemes of honest toil abroad for a life of pensioned and voluptuous infamy at home, it was a very vain imagination. For a time, in October 1794, and later, his prospects were about as little encouraging as those of any young man in England. He had steadfastly resolved not to take Orders, the cardinal point of his benevolent uncle's scheme for him; his aunt turned him out of doors; his mother had nothing to give him; and his intended bride was penniless. His wants, however, were exceedingly modest, but fifty pounds a year. He delivered historical lectures at Bristol, lectures of the beautiful sweeping sort ("from the Origin of Society to the American War") which the intelligent undergraduate delights in; and they seem to have been not unsuccessful. John Scott, the future victim of that unlucky duel, undertook to find him journalism at a guinea and a half a week, though it is not clear that this ever came to anything. Cottle (Joseph of Bristol, the brother of Amos) gave him fifty guineas for *Joan of Arc*, and as many copies of the book to get rid of by subscription. Lastly, Mr Hill, his unwearied uncle, suggested that, as he would not take Orders, he should go to Lisbon (where Mr Hill was chaplain) for six months to "simmer down," and should then read law. Southey consented, but resolving to make desertion of his betrothed impossible, married Edith Fricker on November 14th, 1795. and parted from her at the church-door.



This marriage, and the Portuguese journey which immediately succeeded, may be said to have finally settled Southey's <sup>SOUTHEY.</sup> fortunes in life, young as he was at the time. He was never the man to shirk a responsibility, and though for some time to come he loyally attempted to read law, he soon made up his mind that it was never likely to give him a livelihood. On the other hand, his visit to the Peninsula, with the interest thus created in its history and languages, gave him that central subject and occupation which is almost indispensable to a working man of letters (such as he was marked out to be and soon became) if he is not to be a mere bookseller's hack. Directly, indeed, Southey's Spanish and Portuguese books and studies were about the least remunerative of all his mostly ill-paid work. The great *History of Portugal*, planned almost at once, never saw the light at all; and *The History of Brazil*, its more manageable offshoot and episode, was but an unprofitable work. But this visit to Lisbon, and another of somewhat longer duration which he took with his wife some years later, were of immense service. They thoroughly established his health, which had been anything but strong; they gave him, as has been said, a central subject to work upon in which he became an authority and which served as tie-beam and king-post both to his multifarious work; and they furnished him with one of those invaluable stores of varied and pleasurable memory than

which nothing is of more consequence to a man whose life is to be passed in apparently  
SOUTHEY. monotonous study. He more than once planned a third visit, but war, scanty finances, unceasing occupations, and other things prevented it; and though in his later years he took a fair allowance of holidays, not unfrequently on the Continent, he never returned to Cintra and the Arrabida and those charmed territories of the "Roi de Garbe" to which he looked back as a sort of earthly Paradise, for all his consciousness that neither the things nor the people there were in all ways very good.

Nor were many years to pass before he was established in the district with which his name is connected only less indissolubly than that of Wordsworth. He had indeed no special fancy for the Lakes, nor for their climate after that of Portugal, and for some years at least had great difficulty in reconciling himself to them. But he hated London, where, when he at last gave up the Bar, there was nothing particular to keep him; death and other chances weakened his ties to Bristol, and he had none elsewhere, while his fast-growing library made some settled abode imperative. At last Coleridge, who had already settled himself at Keswick in a house too large for him, pressed the Southey's to join him there. Mrs Southey naturally was glad to have the company of her sister, and they went, at first for a short time, but soon took root. Meanwhile the chief

practical question had been settled first by the acceptance from his friend Wynn, a man of means, of an annuity of £160, and, <sup>SOUTHEY.</sup> secondly, by much miscellaneous newspaper work in the form of poems and reviews. *Thalaba*, which had been finished in Portugal (where *Kehama*, under the name of *Keradon*, was begun), brought him some fame, though his gains from this kind of work were always insignificant. But Southey, if he had expensive tastes, did not indulge them; his wife was an excellent manager—too excellent indeed as the sequel was thought to show, for her housewifely cares seemed to have helped to break down her health of mind and body at last. So he contrived in some incomprehensible manner not only to keep out of debt, but to help his own family liberally and strangers with no sparing hand.

The sojourn at Keswick began in 1801, and only ceased with Southey's life, though immediately after his arrival an appointment, which he soon gave up, as secretary to Mr Corry, the Irish Chancellor, interrupted it. Various attempts were made by himself and his friends to get him something better, but without success, and his own preferences, until quite late in his life Sir Robert Peel supplemented them with a fresh pension, were a Government annuity of £200 a year (much reduced by fees), which enabled him to relinquish Wynn's, and which was given him by the Whigs in 1808, and the Laureateship in 1814 with its pay of rather less than £100 a year. Such were the ill-gotten



gains for which, according to the enemy, "Mr Feathernest" sold his conscience.

SOUTHEY.

Although Southey was but seven-and-twenty when he settled at Keswick, and though he lived for more than forty years longer, it is as unnecessary as it would be impracticable to follow his life during this later period as minutely as we have done hitherto. The ply was now taken, the vocation distinctly indicated, and the means and place of exercising it more or less secured. Thenceforward he lived in laborious peace, disturbed only by the loss in 1816 of his beloved son Herbert, about ten years later by that of his youngest daughter Isabel, and later by the mental illness and death of his wife. He never recovered this last shock; and though he married again, his second wife being the poetess Caroline Bowles, it was as a nurse rather than as a wife that Edith's successor accepted him, and he died himself after some years of impaired intelligence on March 21st, 1843.

An almost extravagantly Roman nose (the other Robert, Herrick, is the only Englishman I can think of who excelled him in this respect) and an extreme thinness did not prevent Southey from being a very handsome man. His enemy Byron, who had no reason to be discontented with his own, declared that "to possess Southey's head and shoulders he would almost have written his Sapphics"; and, despite his immense labours and his exceedingly bad habit of reading as he

walked, he was till almost the last strong and active. The excellence of his moral character has never been seriously <sup>SOUTHEY.</sup> contested by any one who knew; and the only blemish upon it appears to have been a slight touch of Pharisaism, not indeed of the most detestable variety which exalts itself above the publican, but of the still trying kind which is constantly inclined to point out to the publican what a publican he is, and what sad things publicans are, and how he had much better leave off being one. We know even better than was known fifty years ago what were Coleridge's weaknesses, yet it is impossible not to wish that Coleridge's brother-in-law had not written, and difficult not to wonder that Coleridge's nephew did not refrain from printing, certain elaborate letters of reproof, patronage, and good advice. So, too, the abuse and misrepresentation which Byron, and those who took their cue from Byron, lavished on Southey were inexcusable enough; but again one cannot help wishing that he had been a little less heartily convinced of the utter and extreme depravity and wickedness of these men. Still, there was no humbug in Southey; there was a great deal of virtue, and a virtuous man who is not something of a humbug is apt to be a little of a Pharisee unless he is a perfect saint, which Southey, to do him justice, was not. On the contrary, he was a man of middle earth, who was exceedingly fond of gooseberry tart and



black currant rum, of strong ale and Rhenish, who loved to crack jokes, would give his  
SOUTHEY. enemy at least as good as he got from him, and was nearly as human as any one could desire.

Of his famous so-called tergiversation little need be said. Everybody, whatever his own politics, who has looked into the matter has long ago come to the conclusion that it was only tergiversation in appearance. Southey once said that political writing required a logical attitude of mind which he had not; and this is quite true, so true that it was a great pity he ever took to it. From sympathising in a vague youthful way with what he imagined to be the principles of the French Revolution, he changed to a hearty detestation of its practice. His liking for the Spaniards and his dislike of the French turned him from an opponent of the war to a defender of it, and it was this more than anything else that parted him from his old Whig friends. In short he was always guided by his sympathies; and as he was never in his hottest days of Aspheterism anything like a consistent and reasoned Radical, so in his most rancorous days of reaction he never was a consistent or reasoned Tory.

Of his life, however, and his character, and even of his opinion, interesting as all three are, it is impossible to say more here. We must pass over with the merest mention that quaint freak of Nemesis which made a mysterious Dissenting

Minister produce from nobody knew where *Wat Tyler*, and publish it as the work of a <sup>SOUTHEY.</sup> Tory Laureate twenty-three years after it was written by an undergraduate Jacobin, the oddity of the thing being crowned by Lord Eldon's characteristic refusal to grant an injunction on the ground that a man could not claim property in a work hurtful to the public. Which refusal assured the free circulation of this hurtful work, instead of its suppression. And we can only allude to the not yet clearly intelligible negotiations, or misunderstandings, as to his succession to the editorship of *The Quarterly Review* when Gifford was failing. In these Southey seems to have somehow conceived that the place was his to take if he chose (which he never intended) or to allot to some one else as he liked ; with the very natural result that a sort of bitterness, never completely removed and visible in the Review's notice of his life, arose between him and Lockhart after the latter's appointment. His selection by Lord Radnor (who did not know him) as member for Downton in the last days of rotten boroughs, and his election without his knowing it was another odd incident. The last important event of his life in this kind was the offer of a baronetcy and the actual conferring of an additional pension of £300 by Peel, who, whatever faults he may have had, was the only Prime Minister since Harley who has ever taken much real interest in the welfare of men of letters.

But we must turn to the works ; and a mighty armful, or rather several mighty armfuls  
 SOUTHEY. they are to turn to. The poems, which are the chief stumbling-block, were collected by Southey himself in ten very pretty little volumes in 1837-8. After his death they were more popularly issued in one, his cousin, the Rev. H. Hill, son by a late marriage of the uncle who had been so good to him, editing a supernumerary volume of rather superfluous fragments, the chief of which was an American tale called *Oliver Newman*, on which Southey had been engaged for very many years. He had the good sense and pluck (indeed he was never deficient in the second of these qualities, and not often in the first), to print *Wat Tyler* just as the pirates had launched it after its twenty-three years on the stocks. It is very amusing and exactly what might be expected from a work written in three days by a Jacobin boy who had read a good many old plays. Canning, Ellis, and Frere together could have produced in fun nothing better than this serious outburst of Wat's.

Think ye, my friend,  
 That I, a humble blacksmith, here in Deptford,  
 Would part with these six groats, earned with hard toil,  
 All that I have, to massacre the Frenchmen,  
 Murder as enemies men I never saw,  
 Did not the State compel me ?

One would like to have heard Mr Wopsle in this part. For the rest, the thing contains some good



blank verse, and a couple of very pretty songs,—considerably better, I should think, than most other things of the kind published in the year 1794, which was about the thickest of the dark before the dawn of the *Lyrical Ballads*. *Joan of Arc*, Wat's elder sister by a year, though not published till a year after *Wat* was written, is now in a less virgin condition than her brother, Southey having made large changes in the successive (five) early editions, and others in the definitive one more than forty years after the first. The popularity (for it was really popular) of the poem, shows rather the dearth of good poetry at the time of its appearance than anything else. It displays very few of the merits of Southey's later long poems, and it does display the chief of all their defects, the defect which Coleridge, during the tiff over *Pantisocracy*, hit upon in a letter of which the original was advertised for sale only the other day. This fault, least observable in *Thalaba* and *Kehama*, but painfully obvious in the others, consists in conveying to the reader a notion that the writer has said, "Go to, let us make a poem," and has accordingly, to borrow the language of Joe Gargery's forge-song,

Beat it out, beat it out,  
With a clink for the stout,

but with very little inspiration for the poetical. *Joan of Arc* is a most respectable poem, admirable

in sentiment and not uninteresting as a tale in  
SOUTHEY. verse. But the conception is pedestrian  
and the blank verse is to match :

While thus in Orleans hope had banished sleep,  
The Maiden's host had prayed their evening prayer,  
And in the forest took their rest secure.

Very unexceptionable no doubt, but also extremely uninspiring. It is in its own way written very well ; but one sees not why it should ever have been written at all.

Between this crude production and the very different *Thalaba* which followed it at some years' distance, Southey wrote very many, perhaps most, of his minor poems ; and the characteristics of them may be best noticed together. In the earliest of all it must be confessed that the crotchet of thought and the mannerism of style which drew down on him the lash of the *Anti-Jacobin* are very plentifully exhibited. A most schoolboy Pindaric is *The Triumph of Woman*. The strange mixture of alternate childishness and pomposity which is almost the sole tie between the Lake Poets in their early work, pervades all the Poems on the Slave Trade, the Botany Bay Eclogues, the Sonnets and the Monodramas. Even in the Lyrical Poems written at Bristol, or rather Westbury in the years 1798-9, there would be no very noticeable advance if it were not for the delightful *Holly Tree*, from which Hazlitt has extracted the well-deserved text of a compliment



more graceful than Hazlitt is usually credited with conceiving, and which, with the later <sup>SOUTHEY.</sup> but not better *Stanzas written in my Library*, is Southey's greatest achievement as an occasional poet in the serious kind. His claims in the comic and mixed departments are much more considerable. *Abel Shufflèbottom* is fun, and being very early testifies to a healthy consciousness of the ridiculous. For his English Eclogues I have no great love ; but it is something to say in their favour that they were the obvious originals of Tennyson's English Idylls as much in manner as in title.

The Ballads, with the much discussed *Devil's Walk* as an early outsider in one key, and the curious *All for Love* as a late one in another, have much more to be said for them than that in the same way they are the equally obvious originators of the *Ingoldsby Legends*. They are not easily criticised in a few words. In themselves they were not quite ancestorless, for "Monk" Lewis, no great man of letters, but something of a man of metre, had taught the author a good deal. They are nearly as unequal as another division of Southey's own verse, his Odes, of which it is perhaps sufficient to say here that they were remarkably like Young's, especially in the way in which they rattle up and down the whole gamut from sublimity to absurdity. The Ballads frequently underlie the reproach of applying Voltairian methods to anything in which the author did not

happen to believe, while nothing made him more indignant than any such application  
SOUTHEY. by others to things in which he did believe,—a reproach urged forcibly by Lamb in that undeserved but not unnatural attack in *The London Magazine*, which Southey met with a really noble magnanimity. But at their best they are very original for their time, and very good for all time. *The Old Woman of Berkeley*, one of the oldest and perhaps the most popular in its day, is perhaps the best. It has a fair pendant in *Bishop Hatto*, and the Bishop perhaps meets the modern taste even better than the Old Woman. The Fastrada story is too much vulgarised in *King Charlemain*, and it may be generally confessed of Southey that to the finest touches of romance he was rather insensitive, his nature lacking the “strange and high” feeling of passion. But he is thoroughly at home in *The King of the Crocodiles*. Everybody knows *The Inchcape Rock*, and *The Well of St Keyne*, and *The Battle of Blenheim*; indeed it is very possible that they are the only things of Southey that everybody does know. The Spanish Ballads are not nearly so good as Lockhart’s: but Lockhart had the illegitimate advantage of grafting Scott’s technique on Southey’s special knowledge. Nevertheless, it may be said that all the ballads and metrical tales are to this day well worth reading, that both Scott and Byron owed them not a little, and that they indicate a vein in their author which

might have been worked in different circumstances to even better advantage.

SOUTHEY.

Still Southey's chief poetical claim is not here; and the best of the things as yet mentioned have been equalled by men with whom poetry was a mere occasional pastime. Nor do his Inscriptions, for which he has received high praise from some good critics, seem to me quite of the first class. They are, as a rule, too long, whereas an inscription, whether verse or prose, can hardly be too short. And what is worse, they too frequently have the elevation on stilts, the monumental effort in plaster, the slightly flatulent rhetoric, so incomparably parodied and ridiculed in the *Anti-Jacobin* by means of the immortal lines on Mrs Brownrigg. The *style noble* is the most dangerous of all styles. Of *The Vision of Judgment* it cannot be necessary to say anything in detail. It is not so bad as those who only know it from Byron's triumphant castigation may think, but otherwise I can only suppose that the Devil, tired of Southey's perpetual joking at him, was determined to have his revenge, and that he was permitted to do so by the Upper Powers in consequence of the bumptious Pharisaism of the preface. *The Pilgrimage to Waterloo* and *The Tale of Paraguay* are poetically no better though rather more mature than *Joan of Arc*; *Madoc* was admired by good men at its appearance, but frequent attempts, made with the best good will, to read it have not enabled me to place it much higher than these.



*Roderick*, the last of the long poems in blank verse, is also, I think, by far the best. SOUTHEY. The absence of pulse and throb in the verse, of freshness and inevitableness in the phrase and imagery is indeed not seldom felt here also ; but there is something which redeems it. The author's thorough knowledge of the details and atmosphere of his subject has vivified the details and communicated the atmosphere ; the unfamiliarity and the romantic interest of the story are admirably given, and the thing is about as good as a long poem in blank verse which is not of the absolute first class can be.

Of *Thalaba the Destroyer* and *The Curse of Kehama* we must speak differently. The one was completely written, the other sketched and well begun in that second sojourn at Lisbon which was Southey's golden time :

When, friends with love and leisure,  
Youth not yet left behind,  
He worked or played at pleasure,  
Found God and Goddess kind ;

when his faculties, tolerably matured by study, were still in their first freshness, and when he had not yet settled down, and was not yet at all certain that he should have to settle down, to the dogged collar-work of his middle and later age. I have no hesitation as to which I prefer. The rhymeless Pindarics of *Thalaba*, written while Southey was following Sayers in that anti-rhyming heresy which



nobody but Milton has ever rendered orthodox by sheer stress of genius, are a great drawback to the piece; there are SOUTHEY. constant false notes like this of Maimuna,

Her *fine* face raised to Heaven,

where the commonplace adjective mars the passionate effect; and though the eleventh and twelfth books, with the journey to Domdaniel and the successful attack on it, deserved to produce the effect which they actually did produce on their own generation, the story as a whole is a little devoid of interest.

All these weak points were strengthened and guarded in *The Curse of Kehama*, the greatest thing by far that Southey did, and a thing, as I think, really great, without any comparatives and allowances. Scott, always kind and well-affected to Southey as he was, appears to me to have been a little unjust to *Kehama*; an injustice which appears between the lines of his review of it, and in those of his reference to it in his biography. It is perfectly true, as he suggests, that Southey was specially prone to the general weakness of insisting on and clinging to his own weakest points. I often think, when I read him, of a distinguished man of letters whom I once heard reply to a very modest remonstrance (not made by me), "I should write it again to-morrow," setting his teeth as he did so. But this foible as it seems to me is less,

not more, obvious in *The Curse of Kehama*. In the first place the poet has actually given up the craze for irregular blank verse, and the additional charm of rhyme makes all the difference between this poem and *Thalaba*. In the second place the central idea—the acquisition, through prescribed means, allowed by the gods, of a power greater than that of the gods themselves, by even the worst man who cares to go through the course — communicates a kind of antinomy of interest, a conflict of official and poetical justice which is unique, or if not unique, rare out of Greek tragedy. In the mediæval legends, delightful as they are, the interest is sometimes weakened by the illegitimate way in which the Virgin, or somebody else, will interfere to set things right. The defeat of Kehama by his own wilful act in demanding the Amreeta-cup is as unexpected and as artistically effective as the maxim,

Less than Omniscience could not suffice  
To wield Omnipotence,

is philosophically sound.

Moreover the characters are interesting, at least to me. No *Rejected Addresses* shall avail to make me laugh at the blessed Glendoveer, who behaves throughout like a gentleman and a Trojan, as does also Ladurlad. It may be that Kailyal is almost too good a young person; but nowadays in particular, when we have an almost unvarying supply of the other kind in

literature, she ought to be welcome if only for a change. Arvalan, though a very bad man, is a most excellent ghost; Lor-<sup>SOUTHEY.</sup> rinite is a good witch. And then, to supplement these several attractions, there are for the wicked men who love "passages," who like "patches," quite delectable things. The author pretended ("not that it was really so," as Lamb says) to think the famous and beautiful,

They sin who tell us love can die,

claptrap; if it be so, would he had sinned a little oftener in the same style! Nobody, except out of mere youthful paradox, can affect to undervalue the Curse itself. It is thoroughly good in scheme and in execution, in gross and in detail; there are no better six-and-twenty lines for their special purpose in all English poetry. And the first operation of the Curse is good, and the recovery of Kailyal, and the picture of the Swerga (though really Indra is but a cool and insignificant Divine Person) and that of Mount Meru. But the finest scenes of the poem are no doubt ushered in by the description of the famous Sea City which Landor re-described in the best known of all his stately phrases in verse, and from this to the end there is no break. The scenes in Padalon more especially want reading; they are in no need of praise when they have once been read, and a right melancholy thing it is to think how few



probably have read them nowadays. *The Curse of Kehama* may not place Southey in the very highest class of poets, if we demand those special qualities in the poet which distinguish certain of the greatest names. But it puts him in the very first rank of the second.

I am aghast when I see how little room is left for the enormous and interesting subject of Southey's prose. As has been said, there is no collected edition of it; and there could be none which should be complete. There are, it is believed, no documents for identifying his earlier contributions to newspapers and magazines; but he wrote nearly a hundred articles in *The Quarterly Review*, many in many other Reviews, and the historical part (amounting to something like a volume on each occasion) of the *Edinburgh Annual Register* for three years. He translated or revised translations of *Amadis*, *Palmerin*, and the *Chronicle of the Cid*. He edited the *Morte d' Arthur*, Cowper's Poems, divers Specimens and Selections from English Poets and other things. His *Specimens of the Later English Poets* which, with some help from Grosvenor Bedford, he produced for Longmans in three very pretty volumes (1807), is particularly interesting because of its dealing with bards most of whom are utterly forgotten. And of solid independent books in prose he published, besides the three biographies of Nelson, Wesley, and Bunyan, nearly a dozen substantive works, some of them of very great



size. None of these is so well known as the biographies, especially those of Nelson and Wesley. The latter only just misses <sup>SOUTHEY.</sup> the very first rank among the longer biographies—those which enter into full detail and give documents. The *Life of Nelson*, by common consent of all the competent, does attain the first rank among biographies of the shorter class. It will probably be considered by posterity one of the capital examples of that pedantic folly which is always repeating itself that persons, at best qualified to add footnotes of correction and amplification to it, have presumed in recent days to speak of it with disrespect. But the less known prose works must also receive attention.

At the date of *Letters from Spain and Portugal* (1797), Southey had not outgrown (indeed he was only twenty-three) that immature pomposity of style which has been already referred to, and which is apparent both in his verse and in his letters of all this time. The *Letters from England*, by Don Manuel Espriella, ten years later in date, are also at least ten years better in matter and form. The scheme, that of enabling Englishmen to see themselves as others see them, was indeed rather old-fashioned, and not of those things which are none the worse for being a little out of fashion; but it is very pleasantly carried out, and I doubt whether there is anywhere a more agreeable picture of the country and its ways in the first decade of the century. In three pocket

volumes the road from Falmouth to London, the sights, ways, manners of the capital, the SOUTHEY. life (chiefly of the well-to-do middle classes), the chief country towns, the Lake district, and a great number of other matters, are described with a liveliness not seriously injured, and perhaps to some tastes even improved, by the admixture of a considerable amount of political and other reflection. It is surprising that it has not been reprinted. *Omniana*, which was to have been written by Southey and Coleridge together, but to which the latter made only a very small contribution, is less original, being a rather questionable cross between a commonplace-book (such as, after Southey's death, was actually issued in four huge volumes) and a "table-talk" or miscellany of short abstracts, summaries, comments, &c., of and on curious passages in books. Nevertheless these *Horæ Otiosiores*, as their second title goes, contain much curious and not a little interesting reading; and they, too, thoroughly well deserve reprinting.

The *History of Brazil* followed, the chief, and, with *The Peninsular War*, the only one actually erected of what Southey used fondly to call "my pyramids"—pyramids alas! not often visited now, though still in existence, and solidly enough built and based. The latter suffered perhaps more than any other of Southey's books from the necessity which their author's poverty imposed on him of constantly laying them aside for the bread-winning work of the hour as it offered itself. This delay

gave time for it to be caught up and passed by Napier's rival history which, though more brilliantly written, is at least as <sup>SOUTHEY.</sup> partial and prejudiced on the other side of opinion, and (some authorities will have it) is not really more trustworthy in fact. However, *The Peninsular War* was one of the few works of Southey's which brought him a solid, though inadequate, sum of money,—a thousand pounds to wit. Neither *The Book of the Church*, nor its appendix the *Vindiciæ Anglicanæ*, had any such satisfactory result, though both had a fair sale, and though both aroused considerable, if mainly angry, attention. The merits are indeed rather impaired by the peculiarity of their author's ecclesiastical attitude, which was that of a violent "Protestant" towards the Roman Church, and of an uncompromising Anglican towards Protestant Nonconformists. In fact Southey seems to have been singularly unlucky in his money transactions, for reasons partly indicated by Scott in a passage given by Lockhart. The large comparative profits which Cottle's apparently venturesome purchase of *Joan of Arc* brought to the publisher, together with his own unshaken conviction of the lasting quality of his work, seem to have made Southey fall in love with, and obstinately cling to the system of half-profits, which, in the case of not very rapid sales, has a natural tendency to become one of no profits at all. For his *Naval History*, or *Lives of the Admirals*, he was paid down, and very



fairly paid ; but I do not know that he made anything out of *The Doctor*, his last, and  
SOUTHEY. one of his largest works, a quaint miscellany of reading, reflection, and humour, like a magnified *Omnia* with a thread of connection, which is, I believe, little read now, and which never was popular, but which a few tastes (my own included) regard as, for desultory reading, one of the most delightful books in English. Macaulay, who, politics apart, cannot be called an unfair critic of Southey, is unduly hard on his humour. But the temper of Macaulay's mind, whether owing to his Scotch blood or not, was, though keenly appreciative of wit, and open enough to at least some kinds of humour, always intolerant of nonsense, of pure cap-and-bells fooling, wherein Southey took a specially English delight.

Of this delight his poems bear frequent testimony and his letters are full of it—those especially describing the *Lingo Grande*, as he chose to call the curiosities of language which he attributed, justly or unjustly, to his sister-in-law Mrs Coleridge. But *The Doctor* is its chief exercising ground and home. Not that this huge and charming book is by any means a mere compound of alternate horse-play and book-learning. The descriptions of the early home of Daniel Dove in the dales—where Northern scenery is deftly worked in with reminiscences of the author's youth in the West—are of singular beauty, and contain some of the very best specimens of Southey's



admirable English. The famous "Story of the Three Bears," though the most finished, is very far from being the only separable episode in the endless, but by no means incoherent sequence of matter. And of the treasures of learning, never merely dry in itself, and constantly sweetened and moistened by fantastic humour, there is no stint. SOUTHEY.

The characteristics of this wide and neglected champaign of letters,—a whole province of prose, as it may be called,—especially when we add the huge body of published letters, present the widest diversity of subject, and cannot fairly be said to suffer from any monotony of style. To some tastes in the present day, indeed, Southey may seem flat. He scornfully repudiated, on more than one occasion, the slightest attempt at "fine writing," and ostensibly limited his efforts to the production of clear and limpid sentences in the best classical English. Not that he was by any means alarmed at an appearance of neologism now and then. His merely playful coinages in *The Doctor* and the Letters do not, of course, count; but precisian as he was, he was not of those precisians who will not have a word, however absolutely justified by analogy and principle, unless there is some definite authority for it. On the contrary he took the sounder course of actually rejecting words with good authority but bad intrinsic titles. His sentences are of medium length but inclining to the long rather than the short, and distinctly

longer than the pattern, which the gradually increasing love of antithetic balance had  
 SOUTHEY. made popular in the eighteenth century.

His most ornate attempts will be found in the descriptive passages of *The Colloquies*, a book which, though Macaulay's strictures are partly justified, is of extreme interest and beauty at its best, and is chiefly marred by the curiously unhappy selection of the interlocutor,—an instance, with the plan of *The Vision of Judgment* and some other things, of a gap or weakness in Southey's otherwise excellent sense and taste. But in all his prose writings, no matter what they be, even in those unlucky political Essays, which he reprinted in two very pretty little volumes at the most unfortunate time and with the least fortunate result, he displays one of the very best prose styles of the century, perhaps the very best (unless Lockhart's, which is more technically faulty, be ranked with it) of the quiet and regular kind in English.

In the case of no writer, however, is it more necessary to look at him as a whole, to take his prose with his verse, his writings with his history and his character, than in the case of Southey. Neither mere bulk, nor mere variety of writings can, of course, be taken as a voucher for greatness; a man is no more a good writer because he was a good man than because he was a bad one, which latter qualification seems to be accepted by some; and even learning and industry will not exempt their possessor from inclusion among the *dulli*

*canes*, as Southey himself has it. But when all these things are found together with the addition of a rare excellence in occasional passages of verse, with the composition of at least one long poem which goes near to, if it does not attain, absolute greatness, with an admirable prose style and a curious blending of good sense and good humour, then most assuredly the mass deserves at least equal rank with excellences higher in partial reach, but far smaller in bulk and range. SOUTHEY.

In the general judgment, perhaps, there is a certain reluctance to grant this. There is plausibility in asking, not if a man can do many things well, but if he has done one thing supremely ; and unquestionably it is dangerous to multiply the tribe of literary Jacks-of-all-trades. There is no fear, however, of an extensive multiplication of Southeys ; happy would our state be if there were any chance. For the man *knew* enormously ; he could write admirably ; it may be fairly contended that he only missed being a great poet by the constant collar-work which no great poet in the world has ever been able to endure ; he had the truest sensibility with scarcely any touch of the maudlin ; the noblest sense of duty with not more than a very slight touch of spiritual pride. If he thought a little too well of himself as a poet, he was completely free alike from the morose arrogance of his friend Wordsworth and from the exuberant arrogance of his friend Landor. Only those who



have worked through the enormous mass of his  
SOUTHEY. verse, his prose, and his letters can fully  
appreciate his merits; nor is it easy  
to conceive any scheme of collection that would  
be possible, or of selection that would do him  
justice. But if no one of the Muses can claim him  
as her best beloved and most accomplished son,  
all ought to accord to him a preference never  
deserved by any other of their innumerable family.  
For such a lover and such a practitioner of almost  
every form of literature, no literature possesses  
save English, and English is very unlikely ever  
to possess again.\*

\* See Appendix A., "Coleridge and Southey."



## II.

### WILLIAM COBBETT.

TO acquaint oneself properly with the works of Cobbett is no child's play. It requires some money, a great deal of time, still <sup>COBBETT.</sup> more patience, and a certain freedom from superfineness. For, as few of his books have recently been reprinted, and as they were all very popular when they appeared, it is frequently necessary to put up with copies exhibiting the marks of that popularity in a form with which Coleridge and Lamb professed to be delighted, but to which I own that I am churl enough to prefer the clean, fresh leaves of even the most modern reprint.

And the total is huge; for Cobbett's industry and facility of work were both appalling, and while his good work is constantly disfigured by rubbish, there is hardly a single parcel of his rubbish in which there is not good work. Of the seventy-four articles which compose his bibliography, some of the most portentous, such as the *State Trials*

(afterwards known as Howell's) and the *Parliamentary Debates* (afterwards known as COBBETT. Hansard's), may be disregarded as simple compilation; and it is scarcely necessary for any one to read the thirty years of *The Register* through, seeing that almost everything in it that is most characteristic reappeared in other forms. But this leaves a formidable residue. The *Works of Peter Porcupine*, in which most of Cobbett's writings earlier than this century and a few later are collected, fill twelve volumes of fair size. The only other collection, the *Political Works*, made up by his sons after his death from *The Register* and other sources, is in six volumes, none of which contains less than five hundred, while one contains more than eight hundred large pages, so closely printed that each represents two if not three of the usual library octavo. The *Rural Rides* fill two stout volumes in the last edition: besides which there are before me literally dozens of mostly rather grubby volumes of every size from Tull's *Husbandry*, in a portly octavo, to the *Legacy to Labourers*, about as big as a lady's card-case. If a man be virtuous enough, or rash enough, to stray further into anti-Cobbett pamphlets (of which I once bought an extremely grimy bundle for a sovereign) he may go on in that path almost for ever. And I see no rest for the sole of his foot till he has read through the whole of "the bloody old *Times*" or "that foolish drab Anna Brodie's rubbish," as Cobbett used with indifferent geniality to call that newspaper,—the last elegant descrip-

tion being solely due to the fact that he had become aware that a poor lady of the name was a shareholder. COBBETT.

Let it be added that this vast mass is devoted almost impartially to as vast a number of subjects, that it displays throughout the queerest and (till you are well acquainted with it) the most incredible mixture of sense and nonsense, folly and wit, ignorance and knowledge, good temper and bad blood, sheer egotism and sincere desire to benefit the country. Cobbett will write upon politics and upon economics, upon history ecclesiastical and civil, upon grammar, cookery, gardening, woodcraft, standing armies, population, ice-houses, and almost every other conceivable subject, with the same undoubting confidence that he is and must be right. In what plain men still call inconsistency there never was his equal. He was approaching middle life when he was still writing cheerful pamphlets and tracts with such titles as *The Bloody Buoy*, *The Cannibal's Progress*, and so on, destined to hold up the French Revolution to the horror of mankind; he had not passed middle life when he discovered that the said Revolution was only a natural and necessary consequence of the same system of taxation which was grinding down England. He denied stoutly that he was anything but a friend to monarchical government, and asseverated a thousand times over that he had not the slightest wish to deprive landlords or any one else of their property. Yet for the last twenty



years of his life he was constantly holding up the happy state of those republicans, the  
COBBETT. profligacy, injustice, and tyranny of whose government he had earlier denounced. He frequently came near, if he did not openly avow, the "hold-the-harvest" doctrine; and he deliberately proposed that the national creditor should be defrauded of his interest, and therefore practically of his capital.

A very shrewd man naturally, and by no means an ill-informed one in some ways, there was no assertion too wildly contradictory of facts, no assumption too flagrantly opposed to common sense, for him to make when he had an argument to further or a craze to support. "My opinion is," says he very gravely, "that Lincolnshire alone contains more of those fine buildings [churches] than the whole continent of Europe." The churches of Lincolnshire are certainly fine; but imagine all the churches of even the western continent of Europe, from the abbey of Batalha to Cologne Cathedral, and from Santa Rosalia to the Folgoët, crammed and crouching under the shadow of Boston Stump! He "dared say that Ely probably contained from fifty to a hundred thousand people" at a time when it is rather improbable that London contained the larger number of the two. Only mention Jews, Scotchmen, the National Debt, the standing army, pensions, poetry, tea, potatoes, larch trees, and a great many other things, and Cobbett becomes a mere, though a very amusing,



maniac. Let him come across in one of his peregrinations, or remember in the course of a book or article, some magistrate COBBETT. who gave a decision unfavourable to him twenty years before, some lawyer who took a side against him, some journalist who opposed his pamphlets, and a torrent of half humorous but wholly vindictive Billingsgate follows; while if the luckless one has lost his estate, or in any way come to misfortune meanwhile, Cobbett will jeer and whoop and triumph over him like an Indian squaw over a hostile brave at the stake. Mixed with all this you shall find such plain shrewd common sense, such an incomparable power of clear exposition of any subject that the writer himself understands, such homely but genuine humour, such untiring energy, and such a hearty desire for the comfort of everybody who is not a Jew or a jobber or a tax-eater, as few public writers have ever displayed. And (which is the most important thing for us) you shall also find sense and nonsense alike, rancorous and mischievous diatribes as well as sober discourses, politics as well as trade-puffery (for Cobbett puffed his own wares unblushingly), all set forth in such a style as not more than two other Englishmen, whose names are Defoe and Bunyan, can equal.

Like theirs it is a style wholly natural and unstudied. It is often said, and he himself confesses, that as a young man he gave his days and nights to the reading of Swift. But except in the

absence of adornment, and the uncompromising plainness of speech, there is really very little resemblance between them, and what there is is chiefly due to Cobbett's following of the *Drapier's Letters*, where Swift, admirable as he is, is clearly using a falsetto. For one thing, the main characteristic of Swift—the perpetual unforced unflagging irony which is the blood and the life of his style—is utterly absent from Cobbett. On the other hand, if Cobbett imitated little, he was imitated much. Although his accounts of the circulation of his works are doubtless exaggerated as he exaggerated everything connected with himself, it was certainly very large; and though they were no doubt less read by the literary than by the non-literary class, they have left traces everywhere. As a whole Cobbett is not imitable; the very reasons which gave him the style forbade another to borrow it. But certain tricks of his reappear in places both likely and unlikely; and since I have been thoroughly acquainted with him I think I can see the ancestry of some of the mannerisms of two writers whose filiation had hitherto puzzled me—Peacock and Borrow. In the latter case there is no doubt whatever; indeed the kinship between Borrow and Cobbett is very strong in many ways. Even in the former I do not think there is much doubt, though Peacock's thorough scholarship and Cobbett's boisterous unscholarliness make it one of thought rather than of form, and of a small part of thought only.

Therefore Cobbett is very well worth studying, the study being part of that never-ending and delightful game of tracing <sup>COBBETT.</sup> literary genealogies, of filling in the literary maps, which is at once the business and the pastime of the critic. His political importance has seldom been questioned, and I think that on the whole it has been even underrated. His personality is extremely interesting and nearly always amusing, though the amusement may sometimes go a little close to disgust,—for no man ever illustrated both the faults and the merits of *l'Anglais*, if not of *l'homme sensuel moyen*, as did Cobbett. And last of all, though to me not least, there are few more simply delightful writers to read without bothering yourself at all about literary filiations or ancestries, about political revolutions or conversations, about Cobbett the man, or England the nation. It is indeed true (and this is the curse of all political writing, though less of his than of most) that the lapse of time has made it impossible to leave all trouble about politics aside, unless you happen to be thoroughly well acquainted with politics. Even the *Rural Rides*, even the *English Gardener*, nay, even the very *Grammar* itself, cannot be read currently if you do not know who and what “the Thing” and “the Wen” and “the Fool-Liar” and “Anna Brodie” and “my dignitary Dr Black” were; if you are not acquainted with all the circumstances which made the very words “tea” or “taxes,”



“paper-money” or “potatoes,” throw Cobbett into a kind of epilepsy ; if you are not in the secret of his perpetual divagations on locust trees and swede turnips, on Cobbett’s corn and ridge cultivation. But my experience is that, when you once do know these things, you bother yourself very little about them afterwards so far as the mere reading of Cobbett goes. The hottest Tory gospeller could not think of getting angry with Cobbett, or indeed getting into controversy with him at all ; and I should doubt whether even our modern Socialists, though some of his ideas are very like theirs, would greet him very warmly as an ally. He *disreasons* too much (to use a word which is very much wanted in English and has the strictest titles to admission), and his disreasoning, powerful as it was at the time, has lost too much of its hold on present thought and present circumstance.

He has left an agreeable and often quoted account of his own early life in an autobiographic fragment written to confound his enemies in America. He was born on March 9th, 1762,\* at Farnham ; and the chief of his interests during his life centred round the counties of Hampshire and Surrey, with Berkshire and Wiltshire thrown in as benefiting by neighbourhood. His father was a small farmer, not quite uneducated, but not much in means or rank above a labourer, and all the

\* Cobbett himself says 1766, and the dates in the fragment are all adjusted to this ; but biography says 1762.

family were brought up to work hard. After some unimportant vicissitudes, William ran away to London and, attempting quill-driving in an attorney's office for a time, soon got tired of it and enlisted in a marching regiment which was sent to Nova Scotia. This was in the spring of 1784. As he was steady, intelligent, and not uneducated, he very soon rose from the ranks, and was sergeant-major for some years. During his service with the colours he made acquaintance with his future wife (a gunner's daughter of the literal and amiable kind), and with Lord Edward Fitzgerald. The regiment came home in 1792, and Cobbett got his discharge, married his beloved, and went to France. Unfortunately he had other reasons besides love and a desire to learn French for quitting British shores. He had discovered, or imagined, that some of his officers were guilty of malversation of regimental money, he abused his position as sergeant-major to take secret copies of regimental documents, and when he had got his discharge he lodged his accusation. A court-martial was granted. When it met, however, there was no accuser, for Cobbett had gone to France. Long afterwards, when the facts were cast up against him, he attempted a defence. The matter is one of considerable intricacies and of no great moment. Against Cobbett it may be said to be one of the facts which prove (what indeed hardly needs proving), that he was not a man of any chivalrous delicacy of feeling, and did not see

that in no circumstances can it be justifiable to  
COBBETT. bring accusations of disgraceful conduct  
against others and then run away. In  
his favour it may be said that, though not a very  
young man, he was not in the least a man of the  
world, and was no doubt sincerely surprised and  
horrified to find that his complaint was not to be  
judged off-hand and Cadi-fashion, but with all sorts  
of cumbrous and expensive forms.

However this may be, he went off with his wife  
and his savings to France; and enjoyed himself  
there for some months, tackling diligently to French  
the while, until the Revolution (it was, let it be  
remembered, in 1792), made the country too hot  
for him. He determined to go to Philadelphia,  
where, and elsewhere in the United States, he  
passed the next seven years. They were seven  
years of a very lively character; for it was the  
nature of Cobbett to find quarrels, and he found  
plenty of them here. Some accounts of his ex-  
ploits in offence and defence may be found in the  
biographies, fuller ones in the books of the chronicles  
of Peter Porcupine, his *nom de guerre* in pam-  
phleteering and journalism. Cobbett was at this  
time, despite his transactions with the Judge Advo-  
cate General, his flight and his selection of France  
and America for sojourn, a red-hot Tory and a true  
Briton, and he engaged in a violent controversy,  
or series of controversies, with the pro-Gallic and  
anti-English party in the States. The works of  
Peter, besides the above-quoted *Bloody Buoy* and



*Cannibal's Progress*, contain in their five thousand pages or thereabouts, other cheerfully named documents, such as: *A Bone to* COBBETT. *Gnaw for the Democrats, A Kick for a Bite, The Diplomatic Blunderbuss, The American Rushlight*, and so on. This last had mainly to do with a non-political quarrel into which Cobbett got with a person of some professional fame, the "American Sydenham," otherwise Dr Benjamin Rush.\* Rush

\* Soon after the original appearance of this essay, in which I referred to Cobbett's antagonist as "a certain quack doctor named Rush," I received from America, and especially from Philadelphia, lively remonstrances against this description of him. Mr Rosengarten of the Quaker city, assuming that I had "taken Rush on Cobbett's report," very kindly furnished me with some documents, especially a pamphlet-lecture by Dr Pepper, Provost of the University of Pennsylvania, highly eulogistic of one whom Mr Rosengarten himself describes as "the medical beau-ideal of this city, and of the medical profession in this country." I promised to make some explanation if I ever republished the essay, and I now do so. The fact is that I ought not to have called Rush "quack" *simpliciter*: for his education and degrees were quite regular. But I had not entirely taken Cobbett's word (he would be a rash man who should do so on any subject), and I must say that it still appears to me that Rush, even on his advocate's showing, belonged to what may be called the quack division of the faculty. He was essentially a faddist, and between a faddist and a quack there is not much more than a syllable. He opposed capital punishment. He said himself, "I have no more doubt of every crime having its cure in moral and physical influence than I have of the efficacy of Peruvian bark in intermittent fever." He was an anti-alcohol man, an anti-tobacco man, an anti-classical education man. All this shows the quack *ethos*: even though a man may have an array of diplomas that would have covered the backs of the army of Pentapolin of the Naked Arm in their natural sheepskin condition.

got Cobbett cast in heavy damages for libel ; and  
COBBETT. though these were paid by subscription,  
the affair seems to have disgusted our  
pamphleteer and he sailed for England on June  
1st, 1800.

There can be little doubt, though Cobbett's own bragging and the bickering of his biographers have rather darkened than illuminated the matter, that he came home with pretty definite and very fair prospects of Government patronage. More than one of his Anti-Jacobin pamphlets had been reprinted for English consumption. He had already arranged for the London edition of "*Porcupine's Works*" which appeared subsequently ; and he had attracted attention not merely from literary understrappers of Government but from men like Windham. Very soon after his return Windham asked him to dinner, to meet not merely Canning, Ellis, Frere, Malone and others, but Pitt himself. The publication of the host's diary long afterwards clearly established the fact, which had been rather idly contested or doubted by some commentators.

How or why Cobbett fell away from Pitt's party is not exactly known, and is easier to understand than definitely to explain ; even when he left it is not certain. He was offered, he says, a Government paper or even two ; but he refused and published his own *Porcupine*, which lasted for some time till it lapsed (with intermediate stages) into the famous *Weekly Register*. In both, and in their intermediates for some three or four years at

least, the general policy of the Government, and especially the war with France, was stoutly supported. But Cobbett was a <sup>COBBETT.</sup> free-lance born and bred, and he never during the whole of his life succeeded in working under any other command than his own, or with any one on equal terms. He got into trouble before very long owing to some letters, signed *Juvena*, on the Irish executive ; and though his contributor (one Johnson, afterwards a judge) gave himself up, and Cobbett escaped the fines which had been imposed on him, his susceptible vanity had no doubt been touched. It was also beyond doubt a disgust to his self-educated mind to find himself regarded as an inferior by the regularly trained wits and scholars of the Government press ; and I should be afraid that he was annoyed at Pitt's taking no notice of him. But, to do Cobbett justice, there were other and nobler reasons for his revolt. His ideal of politics and economics (of which more presently), though an impossible one, was sincere and not ungenerous ; and he could not but perceive that a dozen years of war had made its contrast with the actual state of the British farmer and labourer more glaring than ever.

The influence which he soon wielded through the *Register*, and the profit which he derived from it, at once puffed him up and legitimately encouraged the development of his views. He bought, or rather (a sad thing for such a denouncer of "paper"), obtained, subject to heavy mortgages,



a considerable estate of several farms at, and near

COBBETT. Botley, in Hampshire. Here for some five years (1805 to 1809), he lived the life of a very substantial yeoman, almost a squire, entertaining freely, farming, coursing, encouraging boxing and single-stick, fishing with drag-nets, and editing the *Register* partly in person and partly by deputy. Of these deputies, the chief were his partner, and afterwards foe, the printer Wright, and Howell of the *State Trials*. This latter, being unluckily a gentleman and a university man, comes in for one of Cobbett's characteristic flings as "one of your college gentlemen," who "have and always will have the insolence to think themselves our betters; and our superior talents, industry and weight only excite their envy." Prosperity is rarely good for an Englishman of Cobbett's stamp, and he seems at this time to have decidedly lost his head. He had long been a pronounced Radical, thundering or guffawing in the *Register* at pensions, sinecures, the debt, paper-money, the game-laws (though he preserved himself), and so forth; and the authorities naturally enough only waited for an opportunity of explaining to him that immortal maxim which directs the expectations of those who play at any kind of bowls.

In July, 1809, he let them in by an article of the most violent character on the suppression of a mutiny among the Ely Militia. This had been put down, and the ringleaders flogged by some

cavalry of the German Legion ; and Cobbett took advantage of it to beat John Bull's drum furiously. It has been the custom <sup>COBBETT.</sup> to turn up the whites of the eyes at Lord Ellenborough who tried the case, and Sir Vicary Gibbs who prosecuted ; but I do not think any sane man who remembers what the importance of discipline in the army was in 1809, can find fault with the jury who, and not Ellenborough or Gibbs, had to settle the matter, and who found Cobbett guilty. The sentence no doubt was severe,—as such sentences in such cases were then wont to be—two years in Newgate, a fine of a thousand pounds, and security in the same amount for seven years to come. Here, no doubt, Ellenborough's responsibility comes in, and he may be thought to have looked before and after as well as at the present. But the *Register* was not stopped, and Cobbett was allowed to continue therein without hindrance a polemic which was not likely to grow milder. For he never forgot or forgave an injury to his interests, or an insult to his vanity ; and he was besides becoming, quite honestly and disinterestedly, more and more of a fanatic on divers points both of economics and of politics proper.

I cannot myself attach much importance to the undoubted fact that after the trial, which happened in June, 1810, but before judgment, Cobbett, aghast for a moment at the apparent ruin impending, made (as he certainly did make) some

overtures of surrender and discontinuance of the  
COBBETT. *Register*. Such a course in a man with  
a large family and no means of supporting it but his pen, would have been, if not heroic, not disgraceful. But the negotiation somehow fell through. Unluckily for Cobbett, he on two subsequent occasions practically denied that he had ever made any offer at all; and the truth only came out when he and Wright quarrelled, nearly a dozen years later. This, the affair of the court-martial, and another to be mentioned shortly, are the only blots on his conduct as a man that I know, and in such an Ishmael as he was they are not very fatal.

He devoted the greater part of his time, during the easy, though rather costly, imprisonment of those days, to his *Paper against Gold*, in which, with next to no knowledge of the matter, he attacked probably the thorniest of all subjects, that of the currency; and the *Register* went on. He came out of Newgate in July, 1812, naturally in no very amiable temper. A mixture of private and public griefs almost immediately brought him into collision with the authorities of the Church. He had long been at loggerheads with those of the State; and it was now that he became more than ever the advocate (and the most popular advocate it had) of Parliamentary Reform. He was, however, pretty quiet for three or four years, but at the end of that time, in September, 1816, he acted on a suggestion of Lord Cochrane's,



cheapened the *Register* from one shilling to two-pence, and opened the new series with one of his best pamphlet-addresses, <sup>COBBETT.</sup> "To the Journeymen and Labourers of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland." For a time he was very much in the mouths of men; but Ministers were not idle, and the suspension of the Habeas Corpus and the famous *Six Acts* prepared for him a state of things still hotter than he had experienced before. Cobbett did not give it time to heat itself specially for him. He turned his eyes once more to America, and, very much to the general surprise, suddenly left Liverpool on March 22nd, 1817, arriving in May at New York, whence he proceeded to Long Island, and established himself on a farm there. Unluckily there were other reasons for his flight besides political ones. His affairs had become much muddled during his imprisonment, and had not mended since; while though his assets were considerable they were of a kind not easy to realise. There seems no doubt that Cobbett was generally thought to have run away from a gaol in more senses than one, and that the thought did him no good.

But he was an impossible person to put down; even his own mistakes, which were pretty considerable, could not do it. His flight, as it was called, gave handles to his enemies, and not least to certain former friends, including such very different persons as Orator Hunt and Sir Francis Burdett;

it caused a certain belatedness, and, for a time, a certain intermittency, in his contributions to the *Register*; it confirmed him in his financial crazes, and it may possibly have supported him in a sort of private repudiation of his own debts, which he executed even before becoming legally a bankrupt. Finally it led him to the most foolish act of his life, the lugging of Tom Paine's bones back to a country which, though not prosperous, could at any rate provide itself with better manure than that. In this famous absurdity the purely silly side of Cobbett's character comes out. For some time after he returned he was at low water both in finances and in popularity; while such political sanity as he ever possessed may be said to have wholly vanished. Yet, oddly enough, or not oddly, the transplanting and the re-transplanting seem to have had a refreshing effect on his literary production. He never indeed again produced anything so vigorous as the best of his earlier political works, but in non-political and mixed styles he even improved; and though he is more extravagant than ever in substance occasionally, there is a certain mellowness of form which is very remarkable. He was not far short of sixty when he returned in 1819; but the space of his life, subsequent to his flight, yielded the *Year's Residence in America*, the *English Grammar*, the *Twelve Sermons*, the *Cottage Economy*, the *English* (altered from a previous *American*) *Gardener*, the *History*

of the Reformation, the *Woodlands*, *Cobbett's Corn*, the *Advice to Young Men*, and a dozen other works original or compiled, besides the *Rural Rides* and his other contributions to the *Register*. COBBETT.

He could not have lived at Botley any longer if he would, for the place was mortgaged up to the eyes. But to live in a town was abhorrent to him; and he had in America rather increased than satisfied his old fancy for rural occupations. So he set up house at Kensington, where he used a large garden (soon supplemented by more land at Barnes, and in his very last years by a place near Ash, in his native district) as a kind of seed farm, selling the produce at the same shop with his *Registers*. He also utilized his now frequent rural rides—partly to provide himself with political poison and to deliver political addresses, partly as commercial travelling for the diffusion of locust-trees, swede turnip seed, and “Cobbett's corn”—a peculiar kind of maize, the virtues of which he vaunted loudly.

Also he began to think seriously of sitting in Parliament. At the general election after George the Third's death he contested Coventry, but without even coming near success. Soon afterwards he had an opportunity of increasing his general popularity—which, owing to his flight, his repudiation, and the foolery about Paine's bones, had sunk very low—by vigorously taking Queen Caroline's side. But he was not more fortunate in his



next Parliamentary attempt at Preston, in 1826.

COBBETT. Preston, even before the Reform Bill, was, though the Stanley influence was strong, a comparatively open borough, and had a large electorate; but it would not have Cobbett, nor was he ever successful till after the Bill passed. Before its passing the very Whig Government which had charge of it was obliged to pull him up. If he had been treated with undeserved severity before he was extremely fortunate now, though his rage against his unsuccessful Whig prosecutors was, naturally enough, much fiercer than it had been against his old Tory enemies. I do not think that any fair-minded person who reads the papers in the *Register*, and the cheaper and therefore more mischievous *Two-penny Trash*, devoted to the subject of "Swing," can fail to see that under a thin cloak of denunciation and dissuasion their real purport is "Don't put him under the pump," varied and set off by suggestions how extremely easy it would be to put him under the pump, how well he deserves it, and how improbable detection or punishment is. And nobody, further, who reads the accounts of the famous Bristol riots can fail to see how much Cobbett (who had been in Bristol just before in full cry against "Tax-Eaters" and "Tithe-Eaters") had to do with them. It was probably lucky for him that he was tried before instead of after the Bristol matter, and even as it was he was not acquitted; the jury disagreed. After the Bill, his election somewhere was a

certainly, and he sat for Oldham till his death. Except for a little tomfoolery at first, and at intervals afterwards, he was in-  
offensive enough in the House. Nor did he survive his inclusion in that Collective Wisdom at which he had so often laughed many years, but died on June 19th, 1835, at the age of seventy-three. If medical opinion is right the Collective Wisdom had the last laugh; for its late hours and confinement seem to have had more to do with his death than any disease.

I have said that it is of great importance to get if possible a preliminary idea of Cobbett's general views on politics. This not only adds to the understanding of his work, but prevents perpetual surprise and possible fretting at his individual flings and crazes. To do him justice there was from first to last very little change in his own political ideal; though there was the greatest possible change in his views of systems, governments, and individuals in their relations to that ideal and to his own private interests or vanities. In this latter respect Cobbett was very human indeed. The son of a farmer-labourer, and himself passionately interested in agricultural pursuits, he may be said never, from the day he first took to politics to the day of his death, to have really and directly considered the welfare of any other class than the classes occupied with tilling or holding land. In one place he frantically applauds a real or supposed project of King Ferdinand of Spain

for taxing every commercial person who sold, or  
COBBETT. bought to sell again, goods not of his  
own production or manufacture. If he  
to a certain extent tolerated manufactures, other  
than those carried on at home for immediate use,  
it was grudgingly, and indeed inconsistently with  
his general scheme. He frequently protests against  
the substitution of the shop for the fair or market ;  
and so jealous is he of things passing otherwise  
than by actual delivery in exchange for actual  
coin or payment in kind, that he grumbles at one  
market (I think Devizes) because the corn is sold  
by sample and not pitched in bulk on the market-  
floor.

It is evident that if he possibly could have it,  
he would have a society purely agricultural, men  
making what things the earth does not directly  
produce as much as possible for themselves in their  
own houses during the intervals of field-labour.  
He quarrels with none of the three orders,—  
labourer, farmer, and landowner—as such ; he  
does not want “the land for the people,” or the  
landlord’s rent for the farmer. Nor does he want  
any of the lower class to live in even mitigated  
idleness. Eight hours’ days have no place in  
Cobbett’s scheme ; still less relief of children from  
labour for the sake of education. Everybody in  
the labouring class, women and children included,  
is to work and work pretty hard ; while the land-  
lord may have as much sport as ever he likes pro-  
vided he allows a certain share to his tenant at



times. But the labourer and his family are to have "full bellies" (it would be harsh but not entirely unjust to say that the full belly is the beginning and end of Cobbett's theory) plenty of good beer, warm clothes, staunch and comfortably furnished houses. And that they may have these things they must have good wages; though Cobbett does not at all object to the truck or even the "Tommy" system. He seems to have, like a half socialist as he is, no affection for saving, and he once, with rather disastrous consequences, took to paying his own farm labourers entirely in kind. In the same way the farmer is to have full stack-yards, a snug farm house, with orchards and gardens thoroughly plenished. But he must not drink wine or tea, and his daughters must work and not play the piano. COBBETT.

Squires there may be of all sorts, from the substantial yeoman to the lord (Cobbett has no objection to lords), and they may I think, meet in some way or other to counsel the king (for Cobbett has no objection to kings). There is to be a militia for the defence of the country, and there might be an Established Church provided that the tithes were largely, if not wholly, devoted to the relief of the poor and the exercise of hospitality. Everybody, provided he works, is to marry the prettiest girl he can find (Cobbett had a most generous weakness for pretty girls) as early as possible, and have any number of children. But though there

is to be plenty of game, there are to be no game-laws. There is to be no standing

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army, though there may be a navy. There is to be no, or the very smallest, civil service. It stands to reason that there is to be no public debt; and the taxes are to be as low and as uniform as possible. Commerce, even on the direct scale, if that scale be large, is to be discouraged, and any kind of middleman absolutely exterminated. There is not to be any poetry (Cobbett does sometimes quote Pope, but always with a gibe), no general literature (for though Cobbett's own works are excellent, and indeed indispensable, that is chiefly because of the corruptions of the times), no fine arts—though Cobbett has a certain weakness for church architecture, mainly for a reason presently to be explained. Above all there is to be no such thing as what is called abroad a *rentier*. No one is to “live on his means,” unless these means come directly from the owning or the tilling of land. The harmless fund-holder with his three or four hundred a year, the dockyard official, the half-pay officer, are as abhorrent to Cobbett as the pensioner for nothing and the sinecurist. This is the state of things which he loves, and it is because the actual state of things is so different, and for no other reason, that he is a Radical Reformer.

I need not say that no such connected picture as I have endeavoured to draw will be found in

any part of Cobbett's works.\* The strokes which compose it are taken from a thousand different places and filled in to a certain extent by guess-work. But I am sure it is faithful to what he would have drawn himself if he had been given to imaginative construction. It will be seen at once that it is a sort of parallel in drab homespun, a more practical double (if the adjective may be used of two impracticable things,) of Mr William Morris's agreeable dreams. The artistic tobacco-pouches and the museums, the young men hanging about off Biffin's to give any one a free row on the river, and so forth, were not in Cobbett's way. But the canvas, and even the main composition of the picture, is the same. Of course the ideal State never existed anywhere, and never could continue to exist long if it were set up in full working order to-morrow. Labourer A. would produce too many children, work too few hours, and stick too close to the ale-pot; farmer B. would be ruined by a bad year or a murrain; squire C. would outrun the non-existent constable and find a Jew to help him, even if Cobbett made an exception to his hatred of placemen for the sake of a Crown tooth-drawer. One of the tradesmen who were permitted on sufferance to supply the brass kettles and the grandfathers' clocks which Cobbett loves would

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\* The nearest approach is in the *Manchester Lectures* of 1831; but this is not so much a *projet* of an ideal State as a scheme for reforming the actual.



produce better goods and take better care of the proceeds than another, with the result  
COBBETT. of a better business and hoarded wealth.  
In short men would be men, and the world the world, in spite of Cobbett and Mr Morris alike.

I doubt whether Cobbett, who knew something of history, ever succeeded in deceiving himself, great as were his powers that way, into believing that this State ever had existed. He would have no doubt gone into a paroxysm of rage, and have called me as bad names as it was in his heart to apply to any Hampshire man, if I had suggested that such an approach to it as existed in his beloved fifteenth century was due to the Black Death, the French wars, and those of the Roses. But the fair vision ever fled before him day and night, and made him more and more furious with the actual state of England,—which was no doubt bad enough. The labourers with their eight or ten shillings a week and their Banyan diet, the farmers getting half-price for their ewes and their barley, the squires ousted by Jews and jobbers, filled his soul with a certainly not ignoble rage, only tempered by a sort of exultation to think in the last case that the fools had brought their ruin on their own heads by truckling to “the Thing.” “The Thing” was the whole actual social and political state of England; and on everything and everybody that had brought “the Thing” about he poured impartial vitriol. The war which had run up the debt and increased the tax-eaters at the

same time ; the boroughmongers who had countenanced the war, the Jews and jobbers that negotiated and dealt in the loans ;  
the parsons that ate the tithes ; the lawyers that did Government work,—Cobbett thundered against them all. COBBETT.

But his wrath also descended upon far different, and one would have thought sufficiently guiltless, things and persons. The potato, the “soul-destroying root” so easy to grow (Cobbett did not live to see the potato famine, or I fear he would have been rather hideous in his joy) so innutritious, so exclusive of sound beef and bread, has worse language than even a stock-jobber or a sinecurist. Tea, the expeller of beer, the pamperer of foreign commerce, the waster of the time of farmers’ wives, is nearly as bad as the potato. I could not within any possible or probable space accorded me follow out a tithe or a hundredth part of the strange ramifications and divagations of Cobbett’s grand economic craze. The most comical branch perhaps is his patronage of the Roman Catholic Church, and the most comical twig of that branch his firm belief that the abundance and size of English churches testify to an infinitely larger population in England of old than at the present day. His rage at the impudent Scotchman who put the populations at two millions when he is sure it was twenty, and the earnestness with which he proves that a certain Wiltshire vale, having so many churches capable of containing so many

people must have once had so many score thousand inhabitants, are about equally amusing.

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That in the days which he praises so much, and in which these churches were built, the notion of building a church to "seat so many," or with regard to the population at all, would have been regarded as unintelligible if not blasphemous ; that in the first place the church was an offering to God, not a provision for getting worship done ; and that in the second, the worship of old, with its processions, its numerous altars in the same churches, and so on, made a disproportionate amount of room absolutely necessary,—these were things you could no more have taught Cobbett than you could have taught him to like *Marmion* or read the *Witch of Atlas*.

It is however time, and more than time, to follow him rapidly through the curious labyrinth of work in which, constantly though often very unconsciously keeping in sight this ideal, he wandered from Pittite Toryism to the extreme of half socialist and wholly radical Reform. His sons, very naturally but rather unwisely, have in the great selection of the *Political Works* drawn very sparingly on Peter Porcupine. But no estimate of Cobbett that neglects the results of this, his first, phase will ever be satisfactory. It is by no means the most amusing division of Cobbett's works ; but it is not the least characteristic, and it is full of interest for the study both of English and of American politics. The very best



account that I know of the original American Constitution, and of the party strife COBBETT. that followed the peace with England, is contained in the Summary that opens the *Works*. Then for some years we find Cobbett engaged in fighting the Jacobin party, the fight constantly turning into skirmishes on his private account, conducted with singular vigour if at a length disproportionate to the present interest of the subject. Here is the autobiography before noticed, and in all the volumes, especially the earlier ones, the following of Swift, often by no means unhappy, is very noticeable. It is a little unlucky that a great part of the whole consists of selections from *Porcupine's Gazette*, that is to say, of actual newspaper matter of the time,—“slag-heaps,” to use Carlyle's excellent phrase, from which the metal of present application has been smelted out and used up long ago.

This inconvenience also and of necessity applies to the still larger collection, duplicating, as has been said, a little from *Porcupine*, but principally selected from the *Register*, which was published after Cobbett's death. But this is of far greater general importance, for it contains the pith and marrow of all his writings on the subject to which he gave most of his heart. Here, in the first volume, besides the selection from *Porcupine*, are the masterly *Letters to Addington on the Peace of Amiens*, in which that most foolish of the foolish things called armistices is treated as it deserved,

and with a combination of vigour and statesmanship which Cobbett never showed after

COBBETT. he lost the benefit of Windham's patronage and (probably) inspiration. Here too is a defence of bull-baiting after Windham's own heart. The volume ends with the *Letters to William Pitt*, in which Cobbett declared and defended his defection from Pitt's system generally. The whole method and conduct of the writings of this time are so different from the rambling denunciations of Cobbett's later days, and from the acute but rather desultory and extremely personal Porcupinades, that one is almost driven to accept the theory of "inspiration." The literary model too has shifted from Swift to Burke,—Burke upon whom Cobbett was later to pour torrents of his foolishlest abuse; and both in this first and in the second volume the reformer, wandering about in search of subjects not merely political but general,—Crim. Con., Poor-laws, and so forth—appears. But in the second volume we have to notice a paper, still in the old style and full of good sense, on Boxing.

In the third Cobbett is in full Radical cry. Here is the article which sent him to Newgate; and long before it a series of virulent attacks on the Duke of York in the matter of Mrs Clarke, together with onslaughts on those Anti-Jacobins to whom Cobbett had once been proud to belong. It also includes a very curious *Plan for an Army*, which marks a sort of middle stage

in Cobbett's views on that subject. The latter part of it, and the whole of the next (the fourth) consists mainly of long series on the Regency (the last and permanent Regency), on the Regent's disputes with his wife, and on the American War. All this part displays Cobbett's growing ill-temper, and also the growing wildness of his schemes—one of which is a sliding scale adjusting all salaries, from the civil list to the soldier's pay, according to the price of corn. But there is still no loss of vigour, if some of sanity; and the opening paper of the fifth volume, the famous Address to the Labourers aforesaid, is, as I have said, perhaps the climax of Cobbett's political writing in point of force and form,—which thing I say utterly disagreeing with almost all its substance. This same fifth volume contains another remarkable instance of Cobbett's extraordinary knack of writing, as well as of his rapidly decreasing judgment, in the "Letter to Jack Harrow, an English labourer, on the new Cheat of Savings Banks."

At least half of the volume dates after Cobbett's flight, while some is posterior to his return. The characteristics which distinguish his later years, his wild crotchets and his fantastic running-a-muck at all public men of all parties, and not least at his own former friends, appear both in it and in the sixth and last, which carries the selection down to his death. Yet even in such things as the *Letter to Old George Rose* and that from *The Labourers*



*of the ten little Hard Parishes* [this was Cobbett's name for the district between Winchester and Whitchurch, much of which had recently been acquired by the predecessors of Lord Northbrook] *to Alexander Baring, Loan-monger*, we can see, at a considerable distance of time, the strength and the weakness of this odd person in conspicuous mixture. He is as rude, as coarse, as personal as may be; he is grossly unjust to individuals and wildly flighty in principle and argument; it is almost impossible to imagine a more dangerous counsellor in such, or indeed in any times. Except that he is harder-headed and absolutely unchivalrous, his politics are very much those of Colonel Newcome. And yet the vigour of the style is still so great, the flame and heat of the man's conviction are so genuine, his desire according to the best he knows to benefit his clients, and his unselfishness in taking up those clients, are so unquestionable that it is impossible not to feel both sympathy and admiration. If I had been dictator about 1830 I think I should have hanged Cobbett; but I should have sent for him first and asked leave to shake hands with him before he went to the gallows.

These collections are invaluable to the political and historical student; and I hardly know any better models, not for the exclusive, but for the eclectic attention of the political writer, especially if his education be academic and his tastes rather

anti-popular. But there is better pasture for the general student in the immense variety of the works, which, though they cannot COBBETT. be called wholly non-political—Cobbett would have introduced politics into arithmetic and astronomy, as he actually does into grammar—are non-political in main substance and purport. They belong almost entirely, as has been said, to the last seventeen or eighteen years of Cobbett's life; and putting the *Year's Residence* aside, the *English Grammar* is the earliest. It is couched in a series of letters to his son James, who had been brought up to the age of fourteen on the principle (by no means a bad one) of letting him pick up the Three R's as he pleased, and leaving him for the rest "To ride and hunt and shoot, to dig the beds in the garden, to trim the flowers, and to prune the trees." It is like all Cobbett's books, on whatsoever subject, a wonderful mixture of imperfect information, shrewd sense, and fantastic crotchet. On one page Cobbett calmly instructs his son that "prosody" means "pronunciation"; on another, he confuses "etymology" with "accidence." This may give the malicious college-bred man cause to be envious of his superior genius; but there is no doubt that the book contains about as clear an account of the practical and working nature and use of sound English speech and writing as can anywhere be found. Naturally Cobbett is not always right; but if any one will compare his book, say with a certain manual composed by

a very learned Emeritus Professor in a certain University of Scotland, and largely inflicted on the youth of that kingdom as well as to some extent on those of the adjoining realm, he will not, I think, be in much doubt which to prefer.

COBBETT. The grammar was published in 1818, and Cobbett's next book of note was *Religious Tracts*, afterwards called *Twelve Sermons*. He says that many persons had the good sense to preach them; and indeed, a few of his usual outbursts excepted, they are as sound specimens of moral exhortation as anybody need wish to hear or deliver. They are completed characteristically enough by a wild onslaught on the Jews, separately paged as if Cobbett was a little ashamed of it. Then came the *Cottage Economy*, instructing and exhorting the English labourer in the arts of brewing, baking, stock-keeping of all sorts, straw-bonnet making, and ice-house building. This is perhaps the most agreeable of all Cobbett's minor books, next to the *Rural Rides*. The descriptions are as vivid as *Robinson Crusoe*, and are further lit up by flashes of the genuine man. Thus, after a most peaceable and practical discourse on the making of rush-lights, he writes: "You may do any sort of work by this light; and if reading be your taste you may read the foul libels, the lies, and abuse which are circulated gratis about *me* by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge." Here too is a charming piece of frankness: "Any beer is



better than water; but it should have *some* strength and *some* weeks of age at any rate." COBBETT.

A rearrangement of the *Horse-hoeing Industry* of Jethro Tull, barrister, and the *French Grammar*, hardly count among his purely and originally literary work; but the *History of the Reformation* is one of its most characteristic if not one of its most admirable parts. Cobbett's feud with the clergy was now at its height; he had long before been at daggers drawn with his own parson at Botley. The gradual hardening of his economic crazes made him more and more hate "Tithe-Eaters," and his wrath with them was made hotter by the fact that they were as a body opponents of Reform. So with a mixture of astounding ignorance and of self-confidence equally amazing, he set to work to put the crudest Roman view of the Reformation and of earlier times into his own forcible English. The book is very amusing; but it is so grossly ignorant, and the virulence of its tirades against Henry VIII. and the rest so palpable, that even in that heated time it would not do. It may be gathered from some remarks of Cobbett's own that he felt it a practical failure; though he never gave up his views, and constantly in his latest articles and speeches invited everybody to search it for the foundation of all truth about the Church of England.

The more important of his next batch of publications, the *Woodlands*, *The English Gardener*, Cobbett's

*Corn*, restore a cooler atmosphere; though even here there are the usual spurts. Very COBBETT. amusing is the suppressed wrath of the potato article in the *English Gardener*, with its magnanimous admission that "there appears to be nothing unwholesome about it; and it does very well to qualify the effects of the meat or to assist in the swallowing of quantities of butter." Pleasing too is the remark, "If this turnip really did come from Scotland, there is something good that is Scotch." *Cobbett's Corn*, already noticed, is one of the most curious of all his books, and an instance of his singular vigour in taking up fancies. Although he sold the seed, it does not appear that he could in any case have made much profit out of it; and he gave it away so freely that it would, had it succeeded, soon have been obtainable from any seedsman in the kingdom. Yet he wrote a stout volume about it, and seems to have taken wonderful interest in its propagation, chiefly because he hoped it would drive out his enemy the potato. The English climate was naturally too much for it; but the most amusing thing, to me at least, about the whole matter is the remembrance that the "yellow meal" which it, like other maize, produced, became, a short time after Cobbett's own death, the utter loathing and abomination of English and Irish paupers and labourers, a sort of sign and symbol of capitalist tyranny. Soon afterwards came the last of Cobbett's really re-

markable and excellent works, the *Advice to Young Men and Incidentally to Young Women*, one of the kindest and most COBBETT. sensible books of its kind ever written. The other books of Cobbett's later years are of little account in any way; and in the three little *Legacies* (*to Labourers, to Peel, and to Parsons*) there is a double portion of now cut-and-dried crotchet in matter, and hardly any of the old power in form.

Yet to the last, or at any rate till his disastrous election, Cobbett was Cobbett. The *Rural Rides*, though his own collection of them stopped at 1830, went on to 1832. This, the only one of his books, so far as I know, that has been repeatedly and recently reprinted, shows him at his best and his worst; but almost always at his best in form. Indeed, the reader for mere pleasure need hardly read anything else, and will find therein to the full the delightful descriptions of rural England, the quaint, confident, racy, wrong-headed opinions, the command over the English language, and the ardent affection for the English soil and its children, that distinguish Cobbett at his very best.

I have unavoidably spent so much time on this account of Cobbett's own works,—an account which without copious extract must be, I fear, still inadequate,—that the anti-Cobbett polemic must go with hardly any notice at all. Towards the crises of the Reform Bill it became very active, and at times remarkable. Among two collections which I possess, one of bound tracts dating from this



period, the other of loose pamphlets ranging over the greater part of Cobbett's life, the  
COBBETT. keenest by far is a certain publication called *Cobbett's Penny Trash*, which figures in both, though one or two others have no small point. The enemy naturally made the utmost of the statement of the condemned labourer Goodman, who lay in Horsham Gaol under sentence of death for arson, that he had been stirred up by Cobbett's addresses to commit the crime; but still better game was made controversially of his flagrant and life-long inconsistencies, of his enormous egotism, of his tergiversation in the matter of the offer to discontinue the *Register*, and of his repudiation of his debt to Sir Francis Burdett. And the main sting of the *Penny Trash*, which must have been written by a very clever fellow indeed, is the imitation of Cobbett's own later style, its italics, its repetitions, its quaint mannerisms of fling and vaunt. The example of this had of course been set much earlier by the Smiths in *Rejected Addresses*, but it was even better done here.

Cobbett was indeed vulnerable enough. He, if any one, is the justification of the theory of Time, Country, and *Milieu*, and perhaps the fact that it only adjusts itself to such persons as he is the chief condemnation of that theory. Even with him it fails to account for the personal genius which after all is the only thing that makes him tolerable, and which, when he is once tolerated, makes him

almost admirable. Only an English *Terræ Filius*, destitute of the education which the traditional *Terræ Filius* had, writing too COBBETT. in the stress of the great Revolutionary struggle and at hand-grips with the inevitable abuses which that struggle at once left unbettered, after the usual gradual fashion of English betterment, and aggravated by the pressure of economic changes—could have ventured to write with so little knowledge or range of logical power, and yet have written with such individual force and adaptation of style to the temper of his audience. At a later period and in different circumstances Cobbett could hardly have been so acrimonious, so wildly fantastic, so grossly and almost impudently ignorant, or if he had been he would have been simply laughed at or unread. At an earlier period, or in another country, he would have been bought off or cut off. Even at this very time the mere circumstantial fact of the connection of most educated and well-informed writers with the Government or at least with the regular Opposition, gave such a Free-lance as this an unequalled opportunity of making himself heard. His very inconsistency, his very ferocity, his very ignorance, gave him the key of the hearts of the multitude, who just then were the persons of most importance. And to these persons that characteristic of his which is either most laughable or most disgusting to the educated,—his most unparalleled, his almost inconceivable egotism—was no drawback. When Cobbett with

many italics in an advertisement to all his later books told them, "When I am asked  
COBBETT. what books a young man or young woman ought to read I always answer: 'Let him or her read *all the books that I have written*,'" proceeding to show in detail that this was no humorous gasconade but a serious recommendation, one "which it is my *duty* to give," the classes laughed consumedly. But the masses felt that Cobbett was at any rate a much cleverer and more learned person than themselves, had no objection on the score of taste, and were naturally conciliated by his partisanship on their own side. And, clever as he was, he was not too clever for them. He always hit them between wind and water. He knew that they cared nothing about consistency, nothing about chivalry, nothing about logic. He could make just enough and not too much parade of facts and figures to impress them. And above all he had that invaluable gift of belief in himself and in his own fallacies which no demagogue can do without. I do not know a more fatal delusion than the notion, entertained by many persons, that a mere charlatan, a conscious charlatan, can be effective as a statesman, especially on the popular side. Such a one may be an excellent understrapper; but he will never be a real leader.

In this respect however Cobbett is only a lesson, a memory, and an example, which are all rather dead things. In respect of his own native



literary genius he is still a thing alive and delectable. I have endeavoured, so far as has been possible in treating a <sup>COBBETT.</sup> large subject in little room, to point out his characteristics in this respect also. But, as happens with all writers of his kidney, he is not easily to be characterised. Like certain wines he has the *goût du terroir*; and that gust is rarely or never definable in words. It is however I think critically safe to say that the intensity and peculiarity of Cobbett's literary savour is in the ratio of his limitation. He was content to ignore so vast a number of things, he so bravely pushed his ignorance into contempt of them and almost into denial of their real existence, that the other things are real for him and in his writings to a degree almost unexampled. I am not the first by many to suggest that we are too diffuse in our modern imagination, that we are cumbered about too many things. No one could bring this accusation against Cobbett; for immense as his variety is in particulars, these particulars group themselves under comparatively few general heads. I do not think I have been unjust in suggesting that this ideal was little more than the belly-full, that Messer Gaster was not only his first but his one and sufficient master of arts. He was not irreligious, he was not immoral; but his religion and his morality were of the simplest and most matter-of-fact kind. Philosophy, æsthetics, literature, the more abstract sciences, even refinements of sensual

comfort and luxury he cared nothing for. Indeed he had a strong dislike to most  
COBBETT. of them. He must always have been fighting about something; but I think his polemics might have been harmlessly parochial at another time. It is marvellous how this resolute confinement of view sharpens the eyesight within the confines. He has somewhere a really beautiful and almost poetical passage of enthusiasm over a great herd of oxen as "so much splendid meat." He can see the swells of the downs, the flashing of the winterbournes as they spring from the turf where they have lain hid, the fantastic outline of the oak woods, the reddening sweep of the great autumn fields of corn, as few have seen them, and can express them all with rare force and beauty in words. But he sees all these things conjointly and primarily from the point of view of the mutton that the downs will breed and the rivers water, the faggots that the labourer will bring home at evening, the bread he will bake and the beer he will brew—strictly according to the precepts of *Cottage Economy*.

This may be to some minds a strange and almost incredible combination. It is not so to mine, and I am sure that by dint of it and by dint of holding himself to it he achieved his actual success of literary production. To believe in nothing very much, or in a vast

number of things dispersedly, may be the secret of criticism ; but to believe in something definite, were it only the belly-<sup>COBBETT.</sup> full, and to believe in it furiously and exclusively is, with almost all men, the secret of original art.



### III.

#### WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR.

THERE might be a worse occupation for some  
LANDOR. proficient in the lighter kind of critical or miscellaneous writing than the drawing up of a list of opinions and sayings which, in other than Herodotean sense, it is not now lawful to utter concerning certain famous writers. Landor would come in for a good share of that list. That the critics admire the author of the *Imaginary Conversations* and that the public does not; that he is an example of classical as opposed to romantic writing; that he will dine late, but that the room will be well lighted and the guests select; that he was partly a philosopher and partly a schoolboy; that he was like Boythorn; that he was not like Boythorn; that he was a better writer of ornate prose than De Quincey; that he was not so good a writer of ornate prose as De Quincey: these and a good many other things require no more saying. If they are said, let us by all means take off our

hats to them as the French wit did in similar case; but let us not repeat them, if we can help it. The dining-room saying especially, though it be Landor's own, is a most treacherous dictum. It necessarily begets in the quoter a secret sense that *he* is one of the select guests, that the room has been lighted for *him* at the late and sacred hour. The contrast-theory, too, of philosopher and schoolboy is to be avoided as much as possible, like all contrast theories, which are for the most part, if not universally, as delusive as they are tempting and as barren as they are facile.

It is an interesting, though perhaps in some little degree an idle, question to enquire whether that popularity, at least that real popularity, which the critics prophesy and implore for Landor will ever come. It is some years now since Mr Crump's edition of the *Conversations* and of much of the *Poems* leaves none of the old excuses open to the slippery. It was true, till this edition appeared, that it was not easy to get at Landor's work. John Forster's edition of the *Conversations*—which is still the only complete or nearly complete edition of Landor's entire writings—was decidedly cumbersome and not very comely. Nor was it any longer to be easily or cheaply bought, having gone through all the three stages which the reluctance of Englishmen to buy library editions of classics is wont to occasion, the steps of "published price," dirt-cheap remainder, and rather expensive recovery to a

price higher than the original. Mr Crump's edition of the *Conversations* is cheap, handsome, handy, and generally desirable. LANDOR. He has taken a great deal of trouble in giving many, if not all, of the numerous various readings, and there is no need to quarrel with his own introduction and notes which are not of the overwhelming kind lately brought once more into fashion. If people will not now read Landor, at least the *Conversations*, there must be something in him which does not easily let itself be read by the general, and which is only to be forgiven by the real student of letters. And if they will not read the *Poems*, it is not because almost the whole of those likely to recommend themselves to the general reader are not easily accessible.

In no purely critical disquisition on Landor can it be now necessary to say very much about his life. It is rather a pity that Mr Colvin did not prefix a short biography to his excellent selection in the *Golden Treasury Series*, a selection which, while it may have made Landor better known in a way, has also, I suspect, acted and will act as a bar to his being known in his complete works. It could have been done by abbreviating Mr Colvin's own biography of Landor in the *English Men of Letters*. Savagius, as Byron irreverently called him, came of Warwickshire folk, affluent and respectable, and he was the eldest son and heir of entail, having been born at Ipsley Court in 1775. I fear, that to call things by their plain names, he was



but an ill-conditioned youth. He appears to have behaved at Rugby like a kind of Guy Livingstone whose forte should have LANDOR. been scholarship rather than flirting, though Landor was a bit of a flirt too in his way. Having gone up to Trinity College, Oxford, he was sent down, before he had been in residence a year, for firing into another man's windows. There is nothing very awful in that for an undergraduate, and I have known it done by persons of great excellence. But Landor did not make the matter better by equivocating when charged with the crime; or by excusing himself on the plea that the recipient of his shot was a "Tory who entertained servitors"; or by rejecting all overtures of restoration, like a sulky child. That his escapade brought him into difficulties with his father involves no discredit to either side; but the fact that the officers of the Warwickshire Militia threatened to resign their commissions in a body if he received one is more questionable, even though the alleged cause was merely the violence of the young man's political opinions. Of the intercessions of a fair Miss Lyttelton for him, and of his wanderings in Wales, of his foregatherings with Ianthe (that is to say Jane) and Ione (that is to say Miss Jones), of his coming into his property, and his volunteering (in 1808) to Spain, and his difficulties with the English representatives and the Spanish authorities there, and his exchange of his inheritances in Warwick-

shire for a wilderness in Wales, there is no room here to speak. Yet one of his Welsh  
LANDOR. friendships — that with the Aylmer family—cannot be passed in silence, for it resulted in some of the most exquisite lines in the world's poetry.

He married, in 1811, a girl sixteen years younger than himself, and one cause of their subsequent dissensions (which broke out very soon) seems to have been her habit of reminding him of the difference. But his marriage had nothing to do with his troubles at Llanthony; though his troubles at Llanthony may have had not a little to do with those of his marriage, by substituting exile and wandering, with no very abundant means, for the easy affluent life which the bride may have promised herself. It would be hardly possible for any one to behave more foolishly than Landor did at Llanthony. That he burdened the estate heavily in order to possess himself of it, and then wasted money on its improvement till he was all but ruined, is nothing. That is the usual fate of men of letters when they take to managing estates. It is less pardonable that he went out of his way to quarrel with everybody, the bishop, the judges, the Lord Lieutenant, his own tenants, and his tenants' labourers, in a manner which it is almost too complimentary to call childish. I at least cannot see anything engaging in a man of ripe age, who, when the bishop had left a letter unanswered, magnificently remarked, "God alone is

great enough for me to ask anything of twice ;” who availed himself of the formal charge to the Grand Jury to present personally an attorney and tax-surveyor who had offended him, and who, when the Lord Lieutenant had after this exploit declined to put him on the Commission of the Peace, pestered the Lord Chancellor to do so and wound up by saying that he “will now never accept anything that can be given by ministers or chancellors.” This sort of thing—this sort of cross between imitation-Quixotry and the heroics of a Frenchman on the stage or in the tribune—is too petty to be even amusing, and too silly to be even pitiable. LANDOR.

Before long, however, Landor was duly filled with the fruit of his own devices. He fled the country under stress of both civil and (for he had thrashed one of his foes) criminal proceedings, and from 1814 to 1835 lived, save for a very short time, abroad and chiefly at Fiesole. The events of this long stretch of his life were much the same as before it began, and ended by serious, and ultimately final, quarrels with his wife; they were also diversified by other quarrels with his neighbours, with the meek if astute Italian authorities, with his friends, with everybody. When the final rupture with his family came he travelled for some time, and then established himself at Bath, where another sojourn of about the same length (1837-1858) was abruptly ended by yet another quarrel. The painful story of the way



in which, as a man of eighty-three, he had to fly from England once more in order to  
LANDOR. escape the results of an action for a gross libel on a lady, has been told with somewhat unintelligible reticence by Mr Forster, and rather more clearly by Mr Colvin. The last stage of this long and strange history was comparative peace, thanks chiefly to Robert Browning. Landor was established in Florence under proper care, the breach with his family, except at the very last with his younger children, proving hopeless; and he spent his last lustrum pretty happily, though he suffered from some of the inevitable outrages of time. He died on September 17th, 1864, having nearly reached the age of ninety.

It is a curious but necessary postscript to the stormy record of his domestic life that almost all his numerous friends (even those with whom he sometimes quarrelled) describe him with one accord as possessing one of the kindest, the most generous, and, when he was not in one of his furious rages, the gentlest and most considerate natures that ever man had. Nor is this testimony in the least limited to, or conditioned by, his circumstances. Just after his flight from Bath, when a comparison of his condition to Lear's might seem not extravagant, much earlier when his strength was unimpaired and he was in no sense, except for his own follies, an object of pity, the testimonials are quite as uniform, and are given by persons of the most diverse characters in every respect. If anybody

who ever really knew Landor disliked him, I think that no literary record exists of the dislike. LANDOR.

He was indeed a perfect slave of impulse, when he offered to publish any poem that Southey might write at his own expense, as much as when he threw (or perhaps only threatened to throw) his cook out of the window. But there is no record that he ever repented his generous impulses, and he constantly made amends for his violent ones. He loved art, more well indeed than wisely, for he was apt to bestow much good money on many not seldom bad pictures. He loved literature nearly as well, though not quite so consummately as he practised it. He loved, with Attic taste and not grossly, good wine, delicate food, fair prospects, and most of all, fair women. Even in his sillinesses there was something not ignoble: even in his most provoking weakness something to reconcile and attract.

It is not easy, in reading over again Landor's voluminous poetical work, to decide on the exact reasons which have, with the large majority of readers, relegated it to the upper shelf. It is almost never bad; it is at times extremely good. The famous passages which lighten the darkness of *Gebir* and *Count Julian* are unstaled in their attraction by any custom. You may read *Rose Aylmer* for the hundredth time with the certain effect of that "divine despair" which inspires and is inspired by only the greatest poetry. *Dirce*, and

the companion passage which Aspasia sent to

LANDOR. Cleone, are equally sure of their own effect. But Landor is by no means

obliged to rely on half a dozen purple passages like these. His enormous total of verse, which if printed with the usual luxury of new poetry (a separate page for even the smallest piece, and not more than twenty lines or so of the longest on any), would fill volumes by the dozen or score, never for long fails to yield something altogether out of the common. From the unequal and motelike crowd of the *Ianthe* trifles to the long "Hellenic" and dramatic or semi-dramatic pieces, the same rule holds good. With Landor you can never read long before coming to the "flashing words, the words of light"; and the light of the flash is always distinct and not like that of any other poetical star. If he is too "classical," he is not more so than many poets of the seventeenth century, especially Jonson, whom he most resembles, and whom (perhaps from a vague sense of likeness) he rather undervalues and belittles. His quality, from its intense peculiarity, is exactly the quality which bribes the literary student. His passion is not unreal; his sense of beauty is exquisite; his power of expressing it is consummate; and yet he is not, at least to some readers, interesting as a whole. They have to gird themselves up to him; to get into training for him; or else to turn basely to the well-known pieces and re-read (he did not like "re-read," by the way, but I do not



remember that he allowed us to "relege") these only.

The reasons of this are probably LANDOR. reasons of combination. Landor has accumulated, in a fashion which might seem to be allowable in one whose quest after unpopularity was so ostentatiously intentional, different and even contradictory claims to the honour of remaining unread. The very scholarly poets are usually rather scant producers; he is enormously voluminous. The dealers in epigrams and short lyrics rarely attempt long-breathed poems; Landor by turns rains epigram (using that word in its proper sense) with the copiousness of a whole anthology, and pours out a steady stream of narrative or dramatic stuff with the ceaseless flow of Spenser. Those two stout volumes, crammed with poems of all sorts and sizes, are full of delight for the few who really like to read poetry. Let us permit ourselves *Sortes Landorianæ* and open one of the pair without even looking to see which it is. We open on *Dry Sticks*, certainly not a promising place to open, and find these verses:

'Tis pleasant to behold  
 The little leaves unfold  
 Day after day, still pouting at the sun,  
 Until at last they dare  
 Lay their pure bosoms bare—  
 Of all these flowers, I know the sweetest one.

Quite trifling verses perhaps, but assuredly not written in a quite trifling style. You may open a

hundred volumes of verse as they come fresh from the press and not find one with that  
LANDOR. style-mark on it. Yet somehow the stoutest devotee of style may be smitten with hideous moments of scepticism when reading Landor. Few men in our days, or in any days at all near them, have had such a faculty of embalming in the selfsame amber beautiful things, things presentable, and things absolutely trivial and null. All the defects of the classical and "marmoreal" style are perceived when we come to such a thing as this,

Better to praise too largely small deserts  
Than censure too severely great defects.

That has most eminently the fault of phrase-making. It is a great question whether even what is true in it is worth saying, and it is a greater question still whether the larger part of it is not false. It is moreover especially liable to the pitiless treatment to which Thackeray subjected another aphorism of the same kind. Why not

Better to praise too largely great deserts  
Than censure too severely small defects?

or

Better to praise too scanty great deserts  
Than censure over mildly small defects?

or in short a dozen other truisms or paradoxes or what not of the same easy kind? It is the inevitable penalty of the "classical" form that it

adapts itself with the most delusive submissiveness to almost any matter. The opposite style (call it Romantic, rococo, or what LANDOR. you will) is at least saved from this exasperating liability; and when Herrick or Donne is not superlatively good, the one or the other is frankly bad.

If we turn from Landor's shorter poems to his longer we shall find, in different matter and in different measure, the same merits and the same defects. The poet with whom it is perhaps most natural to compare him is Mr William Morris. It is indeed almost impossible for any one who knows the two not to think of the *Hellenics* and the *Acts and Scenes* when he reads the *Life and Death of Jason* and the *Earthly Paradise*. Nor is it a very difficult thing to separate the comparative merits and defects of the two. Mr Morris cannot pretend to Landor's dignity, precision, and lasting certainty of touch. He abounds in surplusage; he is often, if not exactly slipshod, loose and fluid; his singing robe is not girt up quite tight enough, and he tends to the garrulous. But he is always interesting; he has the gift of story, he carries us along with him, and the journey is always easy and sometimes exciting. Landor, though nearly if not quite as voluble as the later poet, has an air of the utmost economy, proportion, and rigour. His phrase, if sometimes rather long, is screwed to concert-pitch; he never apparently babbles; there is an air, however modern his subject, of classical severity about



him. Yet Landor can be exceedingly longwinded,

LANDOR. and does not often succeed in being very interesting. Now there are kinds of literature, especially of poetry, in which interest is only a secondary consideration. But I can hardly conceive anyone, except in the way of paradox, maintaining that either drama or narrative ranks among the kinds which possess and sometimes abuse this august and dangerous privilege.

The merits and defects of Landor's very different prose, are much the same; especially in the chief division of that prose, the vast aggregate of the *Conversations*, into which he preferred to throw such work of his as was not verse, while as has been seen even his verse-work had a tendency to assume the same guise. He seems indeed never to have been quite at home in any other. Perhaps he cannot in any case be ranked high as a critic, but his exercises in that kind which are couched in conversational form are at any rate much more readable than the so-called criticisms which appear in the eighth volume of his *Works*, and which are either desultory jottings in the nature of annotations, or else worked into a continuous form which is stiff and lifeless. In fact I doubt very much whether Landor could possibly have succeeded in regular history or essay, narrative or disquisition. His egotism (using the word in no unfavourable sense) was so intense that only the egotistic forms of literature, as I think we may without unfairness

call the Conversation and the Letter, really suited him. And I am not sure that the Letter did not suit him even better LANDOR. than the Conversation.

He himself, however, preferred the Conversation, and he has probably left us the largest, most varied and elaborate collection of the kind in existence. Lucian surpasses Landor as much in variety of literary excellence as he excels Plato in range and diversity of subject; but the whole bulk of Lucian's dialogues would not, I should think, exceed, if it would equal, a volume and a half of the size whereof Landor's fill five. Fontenelle (who for the last century and perhaps more has been too much undervalued) falls into a lower rank than any of the other three, while Erasmus (the only fifth to be set beside these) is, though a much greater man than Fontenelle and even than Landor, inferior to these two, and still more to Plato and Lucian, in intellectual and literary faculty. In these last and greatest respects Plato of course stands alone; and it is not a favourable symptom of Landor's own capacities in either respect that he evidently did not like him. Plato at any rate is the first of all those who have written or ever will write conversations. The only counter claim which Landor can put in against his superiority in dignity of matter and in mastery of style is the greater variety of his own subjects. There is indeed one other claim which he might urge, though it is an illegitimate one at best, the fuller

revelation of personality. We know from the works that go under his name very little, hardly anything, of Plato. From the next, and, as it seems to me next greatest, series of dialogues we know a good deal, though in an indirect way, of Lucian. But from the third we know almost everything of Landor. Given the *Conversations* as the authentic data, with such things as early troubles at college, an unsatisfactory marriage, ample means, uncongenial surroundings, foreign residence, and the like as conjectural assistance, any novelist who knew his business could depict the life of Walter Savage Landor almost exactly as it happened. Nay, he would from the *Conversations* divine most of the circumstances just referred to.

The caution of the author to the reader—"Avoid a mistake in attributing to the writer any opinions in this book but what are spoken under his own name" is interesting but infantile. We always know, we always should know if we knew nothing else about him, from the constant presence of a common and unmistakeable form, when Landor is putting Landor's opinions in the mouth of no matter who it may be. If this to some extent communicates a charm to the various and voluminous work concerned, it must be admitted that it also imparts a certain monotony to it. Greek or Roman, mediæval or modern, political or amatory, literary or miscellaneous, the *Conversations* simply convey in stately English, the soon well known



and not exceedingly fresh or wide-ranging opinions of the author on mundane things, with occasional and not particularly happy LANDOR. excursions into things divine. We know that when any person of the other sex, especially if she be very youthful, appears, she will herself deliver sentiments of an amiable but rather giggling and missish mixture of archness and innocence, while the interlocutor who more particularly represents Landor will address her and speak of her in the style of a more cultivated, gentlemanly, and gifted Mr Tupman. We know that if politics are in question, especially recent politics, the sentiments of a generous but republican school-boy will equally appear. If the subject is literature, woe to anyone who speaks ill of Southey or well of Gifford. Woe again to anyone who speaks ill of Milton; but let nobody speak good of him except in the particular way which is satisfactory to Walter Savage Landor. We must always speak well of Dr Parr, for he was a friend of ours; and we exchanged scholarship and politeness with him when the Warwickshire Militia would have none of us. But we must not speak ill of Dr Johnson, though he was a Tory and a churchman; for he was a man of the Midlands, and so a very honest fellow. Down with the wretch Pitt (against whom we took a grudge when we knew nothing about politics), with the ribald Canning (who was an Oxford man and a scholar like ourselves, but very successful when we were not

quite that), with the villain George the Third (who was a king and whose countenance did not please us). We do not like lords, but if we happen to know any particular lord and he is polite to us, or has pretty daughters with euphonious names, or is related to or connected in some way with our own family, and has not quarrelled with us, let us speak of him and his with a sweet and rotund mouth. If anybody dares to interfere with our comfort whether at Llanthony or Fiesole, in Paternoster Row or elsewhere, let us attend to the sacred duty of literary justice by gibbeting the fellow in as Dantean a manner as we can manage. But when there is nothing of this disturbing kind concerned, and when our heart is full (as it very often is) of the milk of human kindness, and our head (as it generally is when it is not in a state of inordinate heat) of the great wisdom and the stately fame of the ancients, let us write with that pen which is always almost a golden one, as very few Englishmen had written before us, and as hardly one has written since.

I hope this summary is not too flippant; I am sure that it is not in the least unjust. But the only complete way of justifying it would be to go through all the Conversations and characterise each as we went. This would cost little trouble, and it would be very pleasant to do: but I fear it would occupy an inordinate amount of space. By far the more excellent plan is to send readers

to Landor himself, in which case I have no fear of the result.

The Conversations are full of delightful things, and it is impossible for any fit reader to attempt them without discovering these things. Let the subject admit of any description of natural scenery, any dream-scene (Landor's dreams are very nearly if not quite unapproached), any passage dealing with the greater and simpler emotions, any reflection on the sublime commonplaces of life, and Landor is almost entirely to be depended upon. It does not matter, it never with him matters much, what the nominal subject is; the best things written in connection with it are sure to be fine and may very likely be superb. In the "Pericles and Aspasia" (which indeed is not conversation in form but is hardly distinguishable from it) in "The Pentameron," in many of the classical dialogues, and in not a few of the "Literary Men" the author will be found quite at his best. The famous "Epicurus, Leontium, and Ternissa" probably shows him at almost his very best, and at very nearly his very worst. In the dialogues of "Sovereigns and Statesmen" I should say (and not in the least because I generally disagree with the political views there expressed) that he was at his very worst. For politics is after all an eminently practical science, and of the practical spirit Landor had literally nothing. His only plan was to put more or less odious or ridiculous statements in the mouths of persons with whom he

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does not agree, to mop and mow at them, or to denounce them in Ciceronian strains of invective. The infallible test of a political writer, I think, is the reflection "Should I like to have this man on my side or not?" For my part whenever I read Landor's political utterances I say, "Thank Heaven, he is on the other!"

The dialogues of Famous Women are in the same way flawed by that artificial and pamby-pamby conception of the female character which has already been touched upon; while the Miscellaneous Conversations obviously defy analysis as a whole. The author has left nothing better than some of them, such as the long, curious, unequal, but admirable "Penn and Peterborough;" while in others he sinks almost below the level of rational thought. "Lord Coleraine, Rev. Mr Bloombury and Rev. Mr Swan" is fully worthy of the author of the "Examination." It would be difficult to say of whom "The Duke de Richelieu, Sir Firebrace Cotes, Lady G——, and Mr Normanby" is worthy. "The Emperor of China and Tsing-ti" is probably the very worst of all the imitations of Montesquieu; and on at least some others as harsh a judgment would have to be passed if they were critically judged at all.

There are however few writers on whom it must be more repugnant to any lover of literature to pass harsh judgments, because there are few, if any, who have themselves combined such an

intense love for literature with such noble practice in it. For the two things are by no means always combined, and Words-<sup>LANDOR.</sup>worth is far from being the only great writer who may be said to have had a very lukewarm affection for any writings but his own. And the quality of production is in Landor's case of extraordinary strength and peculiarity. On all happy occasions when his hand is in, when the right subject is before him, and when he is not tempted away from it into the indulgence of some fling, into the memory of some petty wrong, into the repetition of some tiresome crotchet, he manages language literally as a great musician manages the human voice or some other organ of sound. The meaning, though it is often noble, is never the first thing in Landor, and in particular it is quite useless to go to him for any profound, any novel, any far-reaching thought. The thought is at best sufficient, and it very frequently is that ; but it seldom makes any tax upon even the most moderate understanding, and it never by any chance averts attention from the beauty and the finish of the vesture in which it is clothed.

The famous dreams which close "The Pentameron" are things of which it is almost impossible to tire. Nowhere else perhaps in English does prose style, while never trespassing into that which is not prose, accompany itself with such an exquisite harmony of varied sounds ; nowhere is there such a complicated and yet such an easily appreciable

scheme of verbal music. The sense is, as has been said, just sufficient ; it is no more ;

LANDOR.

it is not in itself peculiarly arresting. Although the sentiment is heartfelt, it is not exactly passionate. But it is perfectly and exactly married to the verbal music, and the verbal music is perfectly and exactly married to it. Again, it is a whole ; if not perhaps quite flawless yet with flaws which are comparatively unimportant. It does not consist, as "fine" writing too often does, of a certain number of more or less happy phrases, notes, or passages strung together. It is, as I have called it, a "scheme,"—a thing really deserving those terms from the science of actual music which have been so frequently and tediously abused in literary criticism.

Moreover the qualities which exist pre-eminently in this and other great passages of Landor appear everywhere, on smaller scales, in his prose. It is never safe, except when he attempts the comic, to skip a single page. Anywhere you may come across, in five words or in five hundred, the great Landorian phrase, the sentence cunningly balanced or intentionally and deftly broken, the paragraph built with a full knowledge of the fact that a paragraph is a structure and not a heap, the adjective wedded to its proper substantive, not indulging in unseemly promiscuity, the clause proceeding clearly and steadily to the expression of the thought assigned to it. Whatever deficiencies there may be in Landor (and, as has



been and will be seen, they are not few) he is seldom if ever guilty of the worst and the commonest fault of the ornate writer, a superabundance of ornament. Of his two contemporaries who tried styles somewhat similar in point of ornateness, Wilson constantly becomes tawdry, while De Quincey sometimes approaches tawdriness. Of this, nearly the worst of literary vices, Landor was constitutionally almost incapable; and his models and methods had converted his natural inaptitude into a complete and absolute immunity. He is sometimes, especially in his fits of personal dignity and scorn, a little too stately for the subject,—the jokes of our rude forefathers on the Castilian strut may recur to us. He is alas! when he unbends this pride, too often clumsily and even indecently gamesome. But with tawdriness, even with indulgence in literary frippery, he cannot for one moment be charged. In this respect, and perhaps in this respect only, his taste was infallible. His good angel was fatally remiss in its warnings on many points wherein such taste is concerned, but on this never.

If we set ourselves to discover the particular note in Landor which occasions these discords we shall find it, I believe, in a quality which I can only call, as I have already called it, silliness. There are other great men of letters who have as much or even more of the quality of mere childishness; but that is a different thing. Lafontaine and

Goldsmith are the two stock examples of childishness in literary history; and childish enough they were, almost inexcusably so in life. But when we find them with pen in hand we never think of them as of anything but very clever men. Landor alone, or almost alone, has written like an angel *and* like poor Poll, and has written like both at once. Hazlitt was quite as wrongheaded as Landor and much more bad-blooded. Peacock was, at any rate in his earlier years, as much the slave of whimsical crazes. Coleridge was as unpractical. His own dear friend Southey had almost as great a difficulty in adjusting the things and estimates of the study to the estimates and the things of the forum. De Quincey was still more bookish and out-of-the-worldly. But even in passages of these men with which we least agree we do not find positive silliness, a positive incapacity to take the standpoint and the view of a full-grown man who has or ought to have mingled with and jostled against the things of the world and of life. We do find this in Landor. His apologists have admitted that he was always more or less of a schoolboy; I should say that he was always more or less of a baby.

The time-honoured Norman definition of a man is "One who fights and counsels." Landor had in almost superabundant measure that part of man which fights; he was abnormally deficient in the part which counsels. In some cases where taste

(of certain, not of all kinds), scholarship, poetic inspiration, chivalry (again of certain kinds), and the like could supply the LANDOR. place of judgment and ratiocinative faculty, he has done nobly, even without taking into account that matchless gift of expression which never deserts him for long together. But in any kind of reasoning proper he is as an infant in arms; and in that faculty which (though sometimes it be divorced from it) comes nearest to the ratiocinative—the faculty of humour, he is almost as defective. Here I know there is great difference and discrepancy between those who should agree; but I shall boldly avow that I think Landor's attempts both at humour and at wit for the most part simply deplorable, as deplorable as his idol Milton's. Some persons whom I respect, as well as others whom I do not, have professed to see a masterpiece of humour in *The Examination of William Shakespeare*. If by a majority of competent critics it is admitted that it is such, I must be a heretic, yet at least a heretic who can rejoice in Aristophanes (whom Landor did not wholly like), in Lucian (in whom he saw much banter and some wisdom but little wit), in Rabelais (of whom he knew little and whom he evidently did not like even so much as he liked Aristophanes), in Swift (at whom he is always girding and grudging), in Fielding (whom he seldom or never mentions), in Thackeray (of whom, though Landor was his contemporary and survived him, I think as



much may be said), and in divers others. The fact is that the entire absence of proportion in matter, so strangely contrasted with his excellent sense of proportion in style, which characterised Landor appears in this matter of the humorous not perhaps more strongly but more eminently than anywhere else. It was not that humorous ideas did not visit him, for they did; but he did not in the least know how to deal with them. He mumbles a jest as a bull-dog worries or attempts to worry a rat when he is set to that alien art. His three sets of models, the classics, the English writers of the seventeenth century, and the Italians (for of French, German, and, if I mistake not, Spanish, as well as of large tracts of English, he knew but little) had each in them certain evil precedent suggestions for a jester. Landor with unerring infelicity seized on these, combined them, worked them fully out, and produced things very terrible, things which range from the concentrated dreariness of the *Examination* and the "Pitt and Canning" conversation to the smaller flashes-in-the-pan of joking dulness which are scattered about his writings *passim*.

Another thing which is extremely noticeable about Landor is the marvellously small difference between his poetry and his prose. Except again Milton (an instance ominous and full of fear) and perhaps Wordsworth, I know no other English writer of the first class of which this can be said.

But Landor has versified, or almost versified, some of his actual conversations, and has left explicit declaration that not LANDOR. a few of his poems are simply conversations in verse. He would have us believe that verse was his amusement, prose his serious business; but it is certain that he began and for years continued to write nothing but verse for publication in any lasting form. And of the vast stores of work (forty or fifty thousand lines of verse and some three thousand large and closely-printed pages of prose) which remain to his credit, the verse might almost always be according to the old trick "unrhymed" and made into prose with but slight alterations: the prose, with certain allowances for greater exuberance and verbosity in parts, might with hardly greater trouble be arranged into Landorian verse. The sententious, intense, rhythmical phrase is the same in both; the poetical intuition of sights and sounds, and other delights of sense, is not more obvious in one than in the other. The absence of continuous logical thought is not greater here than there; the remoteness from what may be called the sense of business is always the same, whether the syllables in a line be limited to ten at most, or may run on to as many as the limits of the page will admit. Although he was conscious of, and generally avoided, the mistake of introducing definitely poetic rhythm into prose, it is astonishing how close is the resemblance of a short stave

of his verse to a sentence of his prose. It is owing to this, among other things, that his  
LANDOR. form of verse is as compared with that of others a rather severe form, while his prose is, compared with that of others, rather florid. It is owing to this that, while some of the very happiest efforts of his verse have the simplicity and directness of the ancient epigram, some of the most agreeable efforts of his prose have in the proper sense an idyllic character.

And so we have in Landor an almost unmatched example of the merits and the defects of style by itself. To attempt once more to narrow down the reasons of both, I should say that they lie in his having had nothing particular to say with a matchless faculty for saying anything. When the latter faculty is exercised sparingly on the former defect, we often get some of the finest things in literature. The writer's idiosyncrasy is not too hardpressed; it has no time to tire us; the freshness and savour of it remain upon our palate; and we appreciate it to the full, perhaps indeed beyond the full. But when the thing is administered in larger and ever larger doses the intensity of the flavour palls and the absence of anything else, besides and behind the flavour, begins to tell. Yet at his very best, and taken in not too large quantities, Landor is the equal of all but the greatest, perhaps of the greatest themselves. And if, according to a natural but rather foolish fashion, we feel at any time inclined to regret that he lived so long and



had so much time to accumulate indifferent as well as good work, let us remember on the other hand that his best work is scattered LANDOR. over almost every period of his life, except the very last and the very first, and that the best of it is of a kind worth wading through volumes of inferior work to secure. The true critical question with every writer is, "Could we spare him? Could we do without him?" Most assuredly, if we tried to do without Landor, we should lose something with which no one else could supply us.

#### IV.

#### THOMAS HOOD.

MR SWINBURNE, in his *Study of Ben Jonson*, has spoken severely, but by no means with  
HOOD. extravagant severity, of the ordinary fashion in which English classics are edited. It is bad enough in all conscience: but I do not think I am acquainted with such a bad example of it as the accepted edition of the works of Thomas Hood. To no book known to me is Mr Carlyle's favourite phrase, "formless agglomeration," more applicable; and one's wrath and despair are not lessened by a preface in which the late Thomas Hood, the younger, announces that the arrangement is "deliberate," is "intended to be of interest to more than the general reader." For the sake of this *Lector plusquam generalis*, it would seem, Mr Hood "diligently traced the order" of his father's works, "added anything that he found of interest bearing upon them," and "left out nothing that may interest the thoughtful and studious." The thoughtful and studious, pleased

at these attentions, turn to the text, and what do they find?

First of all three volumes and the HOOD.  
greater part of a fourth filled with *Hood's Own*, *Whims and Oddities*, and what-not, served up regardless of "the order of our father's works," undated, and, as far as can be perceived, unannotated. Then, without any preface, the chronological order appears. From 1821 onwards, poems, essays, jests, trivial reviews are huddled together in order of publication, so that we get some sixpenny jokes for the *London* cheek by jowl with "Fair Ines," and that the *Comic Annual* for 1839 and *Miss Kilmansegg* appear to be chapters of *Up the Rhine*. As there is no general index a particular piece must be hunted for all over the ten volumes unless its date is known; while for some mysterious reason the original illustrations, which were in Hood's case inseparably connected with his subject, are stolen from Peter and given Paul in the most bewildering fashion; the cuts of *Up the Rhine*, for instance, being taken out of it (an outrage unforgivable till death by those who know the original form) and scattered about *Hood's Own*. I do not, however, know that even this is quite so unpardonable either as the inclusion, not only of a vast quantity of trivial matter which Hood did republish, but of much that he did not, or as the higgledy-piggledy arrangement just described, by which work in its kind little short of the first rank, is practically thrown into the dust-bin with work



that is almost rubbish. This collection has been reprinted twice or thrice, and in the latest form that I have seen, no attempt has been made to remove the blemishes of the earlier. It may be said, of course, that the serious poems and the comic poems have been printed separately and are separately obtainable. But until very recently there was no separate reproduction of *Up the Rhine*, the best of all the children of *Humphry Clinker*, while separate editions of the comic poems are never complete and vary considerably. Besides, even if it were otherwise, a man ought to be represented best, not worst, in his Collected Works.

As a matter of fact, three or four small volumes at the most would contain all Hood's work that a judicious admirer would care to retain. *Tylney Hall* is by common consent worth but little: and no one can forget the burst of generous, if somewhat hasty, indignation with which Thackeray protested against Hood's wasting his time on the jokes of *Hood's Own*. It would not do to banish that book entirely, for some of his best things are in it; but it may, or rather must be, admitted that there is a very great deal there which is not his best at all, which is hardly good at all. A volume containing all the serious poems, another containing a judicious selection of the comic pieces, *Up the Rhine* by itself with its own illustrations, and a fourth volume containing a selection (more "judicious" still) from the prose miscellanies, would set

Hood in his right place, and silence the ignorant contempt with which he is sometimes spoken of by ill-read persons of the present generation. He never can be set in his right place by *omnium gatherum* reproductions of such merest pot-boilers as "The Last Shilling" and "The Contrast." HOOD.

Hood's special literary claim appears to me to be twofold, the first part resting on the extraordinary excellence of his comic vein, and the second on its combination, in a way nowhere else paralleled except in the very greatest men of letters (among whom, of course, he does not rank), with a vein of perfectly serious and genuine poetry. This combination has, as I have said, existed, though not uniformly, in the greatest men of all: and it may be contended that even in the smaller it is more often than not present in a certain degree. To take Hood's contemporaries, Praed has it, Barham has it ("As I lay a thinkynge," for all its Chattertonism of dialect is a beautiful thing). Although Thackeray's excellence in the serious kind is shown chiefly in prose, every one remembers touches of it in his verse, and generally it may be said that the keenest humour is always near if not to tears yet to thought. But the remarkable thing about Hood is that his serious verse would earn for him no mean place if he had never written anything else. Obligated as he was to turn ink into gold, to be "a lively Hood for a livelihood," he did not pursue this vein far, the

fact, though it seems to shock some people, being  
HOOD. that no man can pursue serious poetry  
far if he has to earn a living by his  
pen in the modern way. Nobody ever has done  
it yet, and I dare swear that nobody ever will.

But between 1822 and 1828, pretty constantly, and afterwards till the end of his life at intervals, he did many delightful things in serious verse. "The Haunted House" stands as much alone as "The Red Fisherman," and is still freer from any touch of burlesque; while the greatest poets have not excelled Hood in the peculiar gift he has here shown of creating what may be called a musical or rhythmical atmosphere suitable to and inseparable from the matter of the poem. The heavy and stifling air that hangs over the piece, the description just in keeping and not in the least exaggerated, the contrast of vivid touches and dark background, cannot be excelled. Lamb's stately eulogy on "The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies" is hardly pitched too high. "Fair Ines" I have mentioned, and if anybody laughs at it let him know that there is one note of poetry to which he is deaf. And even "Fair Ines" is exceeded in its own simple way by—

It was the Time of Roses,  
We plucked them as we passed.

"Lycus the Centaur," one of the earliest of all, and evidently written under the influence of Keats, has some false notes, but is admirable as a whole: and



of even "Hero and Leander" it may be said that hardly shall any one come off better in vying with Christopher Marlowe. HOOD.

Here was a man who could write an "Ode to the Moon" without being ridiculous, and a "Hymn to the Sun" without being inadequate.

He wrote so little of the kind, and was so obviously called away from it by common cares, that it is difficult to decide what he might have done had he been able to devote himself to poetry proper. I cannot quite agree with Thackeray that "The Bridge of Sighs, was his Corunna," by which I suppose we are to understand at once the crowning and fatal achievement of his life. That famous poem, as well as "The Song of the Shirt," seems to me to be vitiated not only by some literary mannerisms, but by a certain sentimentality which is very apparent in much of the writing of that particular day, and which, after going out of fashion for a time, has re-appeared of late. "Eugene Aram," his principal serious piece between his early poems of the kind and the two great lamentations of his last year or two, shows, like *The Haunted House*, the faculty of creating music to fit words, while the "Bridge" and the "Shirt" themselves exhibit this same faculty almost unimpaired. Very few indeed save the greatest possess this faculty, the faculty of producing in fit readers when only a few lines of the poem have been read, a sort of prescience of the music of the whole almost independent (in the

case of one or two of Coleridge's and Shelley's fragments it is independent) of actual  
HOOD. knowledge of the sequel and context. But Hood has it: and though undoubtedly there were some of the blemishes of the Cockney school upon him—an unchastened and sometimes flaccid style, lapses of grammar, confusions of “you” and “thou” and so forth—he belongs, beyond, I think, all question by those who are competent to judge, to the division of the poets who without being of the greatest, are poets undoubted and unimpeachable.

Of his life there is not much to say, though the *Memorials*, which contain the record of it, are by far the best executed as well as the pleasantest part of the very faulty collection already referred to. He was the son of a bookseller, also named Thomas Hood, and was born in the Poultry on the 23rd day of May 1799. His mother was a sister of the not unknown engraver, Robert Sands, to whom, as well as to a better known member of the same craft, Le Keux, the poet was afterwards apprenticed. His father died when he was a boy, and his mother does not seem to have been very long-lived. Hood passed the years immediately before he came to manhood in Scotland with some relations. He did not feel much vocation for engraving; and when he was about one and twenty he had a chance, which he took, of changing the graver for the pen. The famous, but up to this very day constantly misrepresented, duel

in which John Scott the Editor of the *London Magazine* fell, threw the magazine into the hands of Taylor and Hessey the publishers, and they (who were friends of Hood's and had probably had business connections with his father) offered him the sub-editorship. He contributed to the paper as well, and in both capacities became known to and in some cases intimate with its famous staff, the most brilliant perhaps that a young periodical ever had at one time. He was connected with the *London* for nearly three years; and it brought about a much more lasting connection, to wit, his marriage with the sister of one of the contributors, John Hamilton Reynolds.

He was not yet five and twenty, and from the *Memorials* (which frequently share the haziness of the rest of the work in which they appear) it is not quite clear what he lived upon when the *London* ceased to employ him. But he managed to publish the first series of *Whims and Oddities* in 1826, and the second next year, with some *National Tales* which are not good for very much. The then popular Annuals seem to have yielded him profit, and in 1829 *Eugene Aram* appeared in one of them, the *Gem*, while his own *Comic Annual* began at Christmas 1830. It was this that introduced him to the Duke of Devonshire, and so produced the somewhat well-known mock titles for dummy bookcases at Chatsworth. Some of these may not be so very well known now, and it



is barely possible that one or two (such as *Bish's Retreat of the Ten Thousand*) may have  
HOOD. become unintelligible without comment to more than the common ignoramus. The best of all (which Hood himself would have been obliged to me for mentioning just after "ignoramus") is *On Trial by Jury, with remarkable Packing Cases*, though perhaps *Pompeii: or the Memoirs of a Black Footman* is the most comical. *Boyle on Steam, Prize Poems in Blank Verse* and *Pygmalion by Lord Bacon* have survived better than most of them.

The Hoods seem to have lived chiefly at Wanstead—in comfortable friendship with Lamb and other famous people—till 1835, when there came upon them trouble vaguely described as "heavy loss by the failure of a firm." This was the genesis of *Up the Rhine*, for Hood set off for the continent, at once to economise and to prevent his greedier creditors from troubling, but fully intending to pay all that he owed. Except that it gave us a charming book and some letters scarcely inferior, this continental sojourn cannot be said to have been fortunate. Any saving in actual expenditure was balanced by the difficulty of managing literary work (*Hood's Own* was started during this period), by the still greater difficulty of disposing satisfactorily of that work while the writer's legal status was something dubious, and worst of all by bad health. Hood had never been a strong man, but there can be little doubt that

the long disease which with complications killed him developed itself during his stay abroad, and perhaps in consequence of HOOD. some of the conditions of that stay.

The exile, however, lasted for some five years, during which the family head-quarters were first Coblenz and then Ostend for greater nearness to England; though Hood made divers excursions, the best known and longest being that which he undertook, in the company of a Prussian marching regiment, to Berlin. He made many friends among German officers, the chief being a certain lieutenant Von (Hood calls him *De*) Franck, with whom he kept up after his return to England an extensive correspondence full of his own wildest quips and cranks. The chagrins of the exile were brought to a climax by the fact that, owing to legal difficulties, the profits of *Up the Rhine* which should have been considerable (for the first edition was sold off at once) were little or nothing. This as much as anything else seems to have determined Hood to return, and he became a resident Englishman (his heart untravelled had always been John Bullish to the core) once again in the year 1840. Another term of the same length was all the further life that was lent him. He passed it first at Camberwell, then in lodgings overlooking Lord's, and lastly in the Finchley Road. His gains were still very small, and his health became worse every year. But he was more and more recognised as the prince of

his own literary province, he had numerous friends, and seems always to have taken life  
HOOD. with an utterly unruffled temper, and with as much positive enjoyment as a man in the last stages of consumption, with little money and less leisure, can have. His domestic life had always been extremely happy, and the severest critic can only object to it that he used to play ruthless practical jokes on his wife, which is bad, and that she called him "Hood," which would now be worse, though it was not necessarily so in those days.

At Theodore Hook's death he was appointed editor of the *New Monthly Magazine*, and when after a year or two this post became distasteful to him he started a magazine of his own and named after himself. In command of this he died. Of his very last days and of Sir Robert Peel's kindness to him Thackeray's Essay in the *Roundabout Papers* gives a sketch which it would be very rash indeed for any one to attempt to rival or to paraphrase. The end came after months of heroically borne suffering on the 3rd of May 1845, the same year that carried off his only but very different rival Sydney Smith, and but a few days after he had himself written the exquisite lines, "Farewell Life! my senses swim." He was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery, where some years afterwards they set up a monument to him. It is decorated among other things with a grinning comic mask, into the mouth of which when I saw it last some



years ago, the taste and fancy of the British Public had gracefully placed a half-bitten apple. One's disgust was a little HOOD. mitigated by reflecting that nobody would have been less hurt or more amused than Hood himself.

In the two years preceding his death there had appeared the two poems which may be said to have made his reputation with the million—the “Song of the Shirt” and the “Bridge of Sighs”—the former in 1843, the latter in 1844. I have already said that I do not rate these quite so high as some persons seem to do ; and I have hinted at the reason. There is a certain profanity in applying tests too narrowly and exactly critical to work which has produced the poetic effect on so many, which is so undoubtedly poetic, and which, in the case of the later and greater poem, has such remarkable metrical beauty. But both are a little too long (the “Bridge” especially could be curtailed with great advantage), the poet occasionally loses sight of strict meaning in producing his metrical and other effects, and there is considerable abuse of the pathetic fallacy in both. There was force though some brutality in the answering gibe that however cheap and abundant the flesh and blood of shirt-makers and shirt-menders may be, it is very difficult and not at all cheap to get a shirt made or mended properly. And though it may be right to reply “Get thee behind me !” when He with the cock’s feather and the queer-shaped boot critically remarks that most

young women who throw themselves into the

HOOD. Thames do it in a fit of bad temper

or of drink or else hoping to be fished out, there is force in that observation too. But to say this is to say little more than that Hood was not Shakespeare, and that the "Song" and the "Bridge" are not the last words of Charmian or of Othello. And it is most particularly to be remarked that Hood's humanitarianism had not a streak in it of the maudlin sympathy with crime which so often disgraces that amiable quality. One of his very last fragments, dealing with one of the recurrent epidemics of poisoning, ends with these excellent though unfinished lines:—

Arrest the plague with *cannabis*  
And . . . . .<sup>1</sup> publish this  
To quench the felon's hope—  
Twelve drops of prussic acid still  
Are not more prompt and sure to kill  
Than one good Drop of Rope.

One question of interest — the question of priority between Hood and Praed in the peculiar style of antithetical punning for which both are famous, is not an easy one to resolve. Most people resolve it in Hood's favour off-hand; while *per contra* I have known an enthusiastic Praedite disable my judgment with the loftiest of sneers because I was not quite certain on the point of Praed's originality. The main facts are these.

<sup>1</sup> Blank in original.

The "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Clapham Academy," the most famous example of the style, is of 1824, while Praed's <sup>HOOD.</sup> "School and Schoolfellows" is five years later. On the other hand, in Praed's early poems, dating before he left Eton and written in 1820 or 1821, when Hood had written or at least published nothing at all or nothing characteristic, there are distinct traces of the same style, such as "From Chords of Arcs to Chords of Fiddles." I suppose it most probable that similar influences, which it should not be impossible or even very difficult to trace, worked on both; though very likely the definite crystallizing of the style by the more professional man of letters also worked on Praed's impressionable nature. For that "School and Schoolfellows" has no direct indebtedness to "Clapham Academy" is not in nature. On a former occasion I endeavoured to point out some of the differences between the work of these two men, so curiously alike in talent and so curiously different in fortune, and there is no need to repeat the attempt. I have only written this paragraph for the purpose of showing that the almost always silly charge of plagiarism would be sillier than ever in either case. It is practically impossible that Hood should have seen Praed's early work; and though Praed almost certainly saw Hood's finished examples, whatever he took from them only helped to develop and encourage a vein which had independently existed



in himself. Whether the two ever met I do not know or remember: but their spheres  
HOOD. of life lay far apart and it must have been something of an accident if they did.

This, however, is a matter rather of curiosity than of importance. Other "problems" there are none in the admirable simplicity of Hood's character and art—a simplicity which actually explains, though it may at a hasty view seem to conflict with the co-existence in him of the deepest and most unforced pathos with abounding humour. The spectacle which his life presents of simple, natural, unpretentious enjoyment of such modest good things as fell to his lot, and of equally natural and unpretentious fortitude in bearing things not good (whereof he had plenty) is not more unbroken than the spectacle of native simplicity and strength presented by his work. To call him superficial would itself be a piece of superficial impertinence. The quality in him which might be thus misnamed belongs to those who, not being among the very greatest of the world in respect of variety of positive endowment, rise above the great mass of men and of men of letters by an almost absolute freedom from the mental disease which generally (some would say always) produces problems, contrasts of character and work, mysteries, inequalities, secrets. To Hood's infirm and frail body were united a heart and a mind of such flawless sanity and purity, that they were in the good metaphorical sense

almost childlike. Despite his command of the regions in which *The Haunted House*, *The Elm Trees*, and parts of his other work have their being, he was absolutely destitute of anything that can be called brooding or morbid. HOOD.

But he had, except for his great and natural metrical gifts, no faculty of elaborate art: and in particular he had hardly any art of constructing a story beyond the range of the merest anecdote. It is this which makes his prose tales (and especially the later of them) disappointing, and which disables them from competing in comedy or tragedy, as the case may be, with such contemporary or nearly contemporary work as that of Maginn or of Poe. There are excellent [good things in them: there is not unfrequently a happy single idea to start with. But this idea is seldom or never moulded into a real story, and the whole sometimes seems a mere bran-pie of scattered witticisms. To read "The Friend in Need," founded on the sufficiently promising notion of transfusion of blood between a Quaker and a pugilist; and to think what it would have been in the hands of the author of "A Story without a Tail"—to read "A Tale of Terror" (a thing improvised to fill a sudden gap in a magazine) and to remember "The Man in the Bell" or "The Cask of Amontillado," is, to speak unaffectedly, afflicting. Vast numbers of the casual jests which Hood threw off, and which have been so ruthlessly preserved, are equally trying, though no one can read far without coming

to something as inimitable as the answer (said to  
HOOD. be again a mere impromptu insertion  
to fill up a page) of the cat to the  
marsupial who asked her why she didn't carry her  
kittens in a pouch, "*non omnia possumus omnes* :  
we're not all 'possums."

In these jests, be they good or be they bad, there is this same quality of directness, of simplicity, of genuine reflection of the whim of the moment. It is sometimes the cause of their badness; it almost always gives an additional and peculiar flavour to their goodness. Everything is the first running, and often, if not always, a very sprightly running indeed. And it is at least capable of being contended that if Hood had been less under pressure or had been more naturally disposed to the labour of the file, the loss in freshness would have been more than equal to the gain from the discarding of inferior matter. The laboured joke is by no means very often the good joke. Now whatever may be said for and against Hood's jokes they are at least not laboured. They slip away from him, even the most extravagant of them, as naturally as water from a spring. "Rose knows those bows' woes," itself an enormous puerility, a really blessed and Mesopotamian piece of nonsense, did not, I believe, cost him so much as a second thought for the fifth jingle. There is no effort about the suggestion in reference to forged autographs, "how easily a few lines may be twisted into a rope;" none in that other piece of



really deep wisdom as to the unhappy political journalist the reward of whose consistency was that he grew so warped, <sup>HOOD.</sup> mind and body, that he could only lie on one side; none in the disclaimer of any wish, despite the atrocious conduct of Americans as to copyright, to alter the phrase in the New Testament into "republicans and sinners." All these examples are taken from his least known work and on the whole his least happy, the prose tales or articles before referred to.

The verse jokes, who knows not? yet it may be noted as a curious thing that Hood is happier in what may be called the total effect of his verse-comedy than in that of his prose. The point, which in the prose stories is often lost or undiscoverable, seldom fails in the verse. Take, for instance, the admirable philanthropist's defence at the end of the "Black Job," "We mean to gild 'em," or the pathetic and delightful catalogue of the drawbacks of family unity, with its climax in the impossibility of securing "Frederick B." for the whole unanimous sisterhood. I do not know whether it may seem fanciful or strained, but the puns and quips in these verses produce on my ear an effect not dissimilar to that of rhyme and rhythm in poetry generally—they make a sort of running accompaniment, a setting, as it were illustrative but to some extent independent, of the actual meaning. In such a recension of Hood as I have suggested I should myself be very tender

of even the lightest of the verse, while I confess I  
HOOD. should slash with a very desperate hook  
at field after field of the prose.

There is one division of Hood's humorous work which has been perhaps as much admired as any other, and which certainly deserves the praise of being marvellously original and dexterous in an extremely difficult way. This is the division at the head of which is the famous "Miss Kilmansegg," while other characteristic examples of it are "The Desert Born," and that terrific ballad at the end of which the wrecked mariner finds himself on no demon ship but on the *Mary Ann* of Shields. This is the class in which the strongest possible contrast of the grotesque and terrible is used, the author being comparatively indifferent whether he leads up through a farcical prelude to a serious termination or *vice versa*. I do not profess any extraordinary affection for this mixed kind (which was probably made popular first by Southey's "Ballads"); and if anything like it must be done I prefer the handling of "The Red Fisherman," where there is no actual revulsion, no final change from laughter to terror, or from terror to laughter, but a sustained blending of the two. Nevertheless, Hood's handling of the style is superlatively adroit in its own way, and it would be superfluous to praise the incidental passages which it gives him opportunity to insert, such as those famous ones in "Miss Kilmansegg" and "The Desert Born" especially. But there is a good deal of mere trick

in this whole class of verse—especially in the tragi-comic or happy-ending division of it—and whatsoever is mere trick can HOOD. hardly be pronounced good in the highest sense. Perhaps the best thing to be said for it is that it seems to have had the power of spurring the author on to the production of his best things, an effect not at all difficult to understand, and which he himself would have expounded with many whimsical illustrations, both verbal and figurative.

For Hood's illustrations (in the ordinary sense of the word) must never be forgotten in any account of his work. He had had, as we have seen, a regular education in a certain kind of art; but though I do not pretend to profound technical knowledge in that matter, I doubt whether this education had much to do with the peculiar character of the "cuts" with which he embellished so much of his work. They are avowedly caricature; and it is possible that the faults of drawing, which in them merely add to the effectiveness of the work, would have been equally present if the author had attempted things more ambitious. It is also possible that this would not have been the case. At any rate, Hood as an artist in line never to my knowledge produces the effect which Thackeray produces, and knew that he produced, in that character—the effect of a man trying to do what he cannot do. He hits his intended effect of grotesque perfectly and admirably. It is most



natural to compare him with Cruikshank, but

HOOD. however far below that artist he may be as a mere draughtsman and as a composer, he is above him in the felicity with which he proportions his aims to his means. Everybody knows plates of Cruikshank's in which it is quite clear that the artist meant to depict ordinary human beings and in which he has merely depicted monsters. Hood always kept clear of this danger. Nor indeed do I know any artist in grotesque of this peculiar kind during the century who has far excelled him, except that admirable designer M. Caran D'Ache. The Polish-Frenchman is of course far Hood's superior as a draughtsman and as an artist, but on the literary side, as artists are pleased to call it, in which he himself is so excellent, he does not go so far beyond the author and illustrator of *Up the Rhine*, of the *Whims and Oddities*, of *Hood's Own* and the rest. It would be difficult to find two artists more unlike in technique, and yet more similar in general spirit and conception.

Still, when all is said and done I confess my own preference for Hood as a writer of serious verse over Hood as a jester, admitting likewise and at the same time that the enjoyment of Hood as a serious writer of verse might be less if we did not know him as a jester. Life would be absolutely worthless without jest, without quip, without (let it be frankly avowed) punning, but fortunately the

faculty of these things is not often wholly denied to men of brains who happen also to be of English birth. Borrow says, and HOOD. as I fear it is true, that nothing is so low as a low Englishman. It might be said with equal truth that nothing is so dull as a dull Englishman. Yet there has been vouchsafed to our race in compensation a pretty general ability to giggle and make giggle. There has rarely been dearth of merriment in England till very late years indeed—till in fact England became, it may be better it may be worse, but certainly less English than it used to be. Nor can it be said that Hood's fun, good as it is and extraordinarily abundant as it is in measure, is in any similarly extraordinary way peculiar in kind. It is genuine but not remarkably distinct, fresh and original, but still not very full of idiosyncrasy. It does not touch Shakespeare or Swift or Thackeray or even Dickens. It is rather in our literature the nearest approach to that quality which in another received the rather unjustly stinted praise that its owner had more than any one else what everybody had. In other words, it is perennially and in a superior degree what the cleverest undergraduate has sometimes at a very happy two o'clock in the morning.

In the serious verse a similar characteristic produces quite a different result. Here too there is nothing extraordinarily rare or far brought in kind. We shall not find in Hood anything like

the notes, once heard and never forgotten, of  
HOOD. "La belle Dame sans Merci," of "Oh  
World! Oh Life! Oh Time!" of "All  
Thoughts, all Passions, all Delights," of "Proud  
Maisie." No poem of his attains quite the first rank  
as a lyric; and every poem of his which is not a  
lyric has more or fewer blemishes, tediousnesses,  
inequalities. Yet there is a singular variety in him  
and each of the lines which makes up the variety  
has a remarkable charm. It is as though a certain  
average kind of thought and feeling had suddenly  
been endowed with the faculty of presenting itself  
poetically, and had taken the widest possible range  
in doing so. Hood was not what is called a classi-  
cal scholar, yet how many people who could give  
him considerable odds in the matter of Attic per-  
fects could have written "Giver of Glowing Light"?  
He was not, as Moore was, a musician, and he does  
not seem to have had the natural song faculty of  
the Irishman. Yet what ballads of their class sur-  
pass "Fair Ines," and "It was not in the Winter,"  
and "The Dead are in the Silent Graves," and  
"The Stars are with the Voyager"? Of "The  
Haunted House" I have spoken, but how many  
poets even if they had been able to write "The  
Haunted House" could have paired it with such  
a pendant as "The Elm Tree"? In all these  
pieces the thing that particularly charms me is  
what I may perhaps be allowed to call the un-  
usually close contact of the commonplace and  
the poetical—the fact that we have as it were in



this poet got hold of the very meeting or parting place, whichever phrase may be preferred, of the two temperaments as <sup>HOOD.</sup> they are generally supposed to be. Scarcely any poet who was so much of a Christian or an ordinary man as Hood in all relations of life,—who had so little of fine frenzy, who was so little sad or bad or mad, who was so far removed from Bohemianism, who lived such a steady-going, hard-working, when he could scot-and-lot paying existence—has left work of such poetical quality: none who had so little literary culture has such a flavour of literature properly so-called.

And in no poet is there a clearer instance on the one hand of the fact that poetry can touch any life to its own issues, and on the other, of the curious, the unmistakable, and yet the scarcely to be defined difference between what is poetry and what is not. It is no easy task, taking a piece of say Haynes Bayly's and a piece of Hood's to point out exactly what it is that makes one ridiculous and the other delightful. Yet there the difference is, and as there is still a tendency to look down on verse that is not elaborately embroidered (did not a critic once dismiss Lord Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar" with kind approval as "homely"), it is always comforting and desirable to come back to such utterly unpretentious and yet such unmistakably poetical work, to work so simple, so pure, so strong, as Hood's. We might not care to have all Par-

nassus peopled with his likes; he has only his  
HOOD. own place and only his own value. But  
that place and that value are secure  
as long as any one who at once knows poetry  
and can read English comes across the right  
divisions of his work.

## V.

### MISS FERRIER.

AN old novel is to some people, I believe, a piece of literature worthy to be ranked with an old newspaper or an old almanack—not quite so dull as the last, a good deal duller than the first, but sharing with both the same distinguishing quality, that of essential incapacity to fulfil the reason of its existence. Students of the philosophy of language may be left to decide whether this is or is not a proof of the singular tyranny of names—an unconscious practical syllogism with the major premiss that a novel must be new. But no one, I think, is likely to contest the fact that such a view of old novels does prevail. If it prevails with any one who is accustomed to read for something else than the mere story, this must be set down to a conviction that in at least the majority of novels there is nothing more than the story, and very often exceedingly little of that. But the books which form the subject of the present essay have been exempted by high authorities and repeated



reappearance from the reproach of more or less  
MISS hardy annuals.\* They have very high  
FERRIER. testimonials, some of which must be  
known to many people in whose way the books  
themselves have never fallen. Scott praised them  
highly, not only, as he was wont to do with per-  
haps more generosity and good nature than strictly  
critical exactness, in private, but in his published  
works. Mackintosh read *Destiny* with an absorp-  
tion sufficient to make him forget all about an  
impending dissolution of Parliament, for the news  
of which he was anxiously waiting. There is  
praise of Miss Ferrier in the *Noctes* — praise  
which certainly does not require forgiveness as  
in Tennyson's case.

But, above all, there is something curious and,  
at the present day especially, almost portentous in  
the fact that Miss Ferrier was content to write  
three novels, and three only. She had no impera-

\* This essay was originally written on the text of the six-volume edition of Miss Ferrier's novels published by Messrs Bentley in 1882. Twelve years later the publisher of this present book issued another edition the introduction of which contained a not inconsiderable selection of unpublished letters, furnished, I understand, by Miss Ferrier's nephew, who has since been good enough to inform me that he has a much larger store of them. They are of no small intrinsic interest, which may be a little obscured to modern eyes by the fact that, in the earlier ones at any rate, Miss Ferrier pretty obviously had before her the letter-writers of the novelists from Richardson downwards and so herself writes in a kind of falsetto; while the severity of touch which is apparent in the novels is even more marked here. But at the same time they exhibit the masculine strength of their author's understanding, her shrewd observation, and the excellent use she could make of it.

tive private reasons for ceasing to write; she had won a great deal of reputation by her books, and (a consideration which certainly would not have weakened the case with most people) she had made money in a most agreeably increasing proportion by her three ventures. *Marriage* brought her in £150; not a magnificent sum, certainly, but more than most novelists even of greater genius have made by their first novels. *The Inheritance* was sold for £1,000, and *Destiny* for £1,700. She might probably have depended on at least as much for a fourth novel. But she persistently refused to write any more, and the probable reason for this refusal (as to which I may have something to say) rather heightens than impairs the merit of the refusal. So she remains in literary history a singular and almost unique figure. Men and women of one book—a book in most cases inspired by some peculiar circumstance or combination of circumstances—are not uncommon. But that an author should live many days, should try the game three several times with result of praise and profit, and then retire from the field without any disgust such as checked Congreve or any sufficient disabling cause, this is certainly a most unusual thing.

Susan Edmonstone Ferrier was born at Edinburgh on the 7th of September, 1782. The memoirs which have been prefixed to the various editions of her works, and to which I am indebted

for the facts of her biography, enter after the manner of the Scotch with some minuteness into her genealogy and family connections. Among these latter in various distances of ascent, descent, and collateral relation figure Archbishop Tait of Canterbury, Lord Braxfield (famous as the hero of many anecdotes of judicial and jocular brutality), and some other persons of note. But the principal fact of interest in this kind about Miss Ferrier is that she was aunt of "the last of the metaphysicians" as he has sometimes been called, the late Professor Ferrier of St Andrews. Her father was a Writer to the Signet, and among his clients was the fifth Duke of Argyll. He and his daughter were frequent visitors at Inveraray, and these visits are said, with pretty evident truth, to have had not a little influence in supplying Miss Ferrier with subjects of study and determining the character and personal arrangement of her books. Miss Clavering, her most frequent correspondent, was the Duke's niece: Lady Charlotte Campbell (afterwards Bury) was also an intimate of hers, and friends and members of the Argyll family are said to have sat for not a few personages of the novels. Whatever criticism these works may be exposed to, even Madame de Staël, in the mood in which (according to a priceless anecdote recounted by Mr Austen Leigh in his life of his aunt) she returned one of Miss Austen's novels with the disdainful comment, "vulgaire," could not have



objected to the *ton* of Miss Ferrier's people. Her first heroine is an earl's grand-daughter; her second, a countess in her own right; her third, the only surviving child of a great Highland chieftain; and in all her books, countesses and duchesses, baronets and Honourable Mr So-and-so's, "do be jostling each other." This, it is true, was very much the way of the novel of the period, and Miss Austen was almost the first to break through it—indeed, it may be shrewdly suspected that Corinne's fine feelings were secretly shared by a large number of readers, and that this had not a little to do with the comparatively limited success of *Pride and Prejudice* and its fellows. There is, perhaps, present in Miss Ferrier herself, the least little feeling of the same kind; her books contain some excellent sentiments on the vanity of rank and fashion, but somehow they leave on the reader's mind an impression that the author is secretly of Major Pendennis's mind as to the value of good acquaintances, and that it was more comfortable to her to walk down her literary St James's Street on the arm of an earl than on that of a simple commoner who would have been puzzled to tell the name and status of his grandfather. However this may be, her sketches were at least taken from the life, and she did not, like certain writers of our own day, talk familiarly of "the Honourable Jem and the Honourable Jemima" on the strength of seeing the one at a

respectful distance in a club smoking-room, and  
MISS the other across some yards of gravel  
FERRIER. and the railings of Rotten Row.

It is not quite clear at what time *Marriage* was actually begun, but that it was begun in consequence of the Inveraray visits and of the company of "fashionables" and of originals there open to inspection, is pretty clear. It seems to have been planned with the before mentioned Miss Clavering, who was not only confidante, but was allowed to hold in some small degree the more honourable and responsible position of collaborator. The book was certainly in great part written before 1810, and was read in manuscript to Lady Charlotte Campbell, who approved of it highly. But though the author saw a great deal of literary society — she and her father visited Scott at Ashestiel soon after the date just mentioned—the book did not appear till 1818, when it was published by Blackwood. It may be suspected that part of the reason for hesitation was the audacious extent to which (as is acknowledged in the correspondence with Miss Clavering) the characters were taken from living originals. However this may be, it appeared at last and was highly popular, drawing forth, immediately after its appearance, a public compliment from Sir Walter.

The original idea of *Marriage* is stated correctly enough in a letter to Miss Clavering. It is the introduction of a spoilt child of English fashion-

able life to a rough Highland home abounding with characters. Miss Ferrier's way of working out this conception was to MISS FERRIER. a certain extent conventional—it is doubtful whether, with all her power, she ever got quite as clear of convention as did her admirable contemporary, Jane Austen—but it brings about many very comical and delightful situations. Lady Juliana Lindore is the daughter of a somewhat embarrassed English peer, the Earl of Courtland. Having no idea beyond her collection of pets, the society to which she has been accustomed, and a certain varnish of romance about handsome lovers and love in a cottage with a double coach-house, she receives with consternation her father's announcement that she is to marry an ugly duke. For a time she vacillates, chiefly owing to the splendour of the duke's presents, but at last the good looks of her handsome lover, Harry Douglas, prevail, and the pair elope to Scotland and are married. Douglas has a commission in the Guards, and though he is only the second son of a petty landowner, he has fortunately attracted the attention of a rich bachelor, General Cameron. But the general is disgusted with his favourite's escapade, Lord Courtland disowns his daughter, and after a brief honeymoon there is nothing for it but to accept his father's invitation to the ancestral mansion in the Highlands. The pair set out with man and maid, pug, macaw, and squirrel, and Lady Juliana has pleasant



visions of a romantic, but at the same time elegant, retreat where they will sojourn for a short time, receiving the attentions of the countryside and giving *fêtes champêtres* in return, till they once more enjoy the pleasures of London with a handsome endowment from her husband's father. The husband has some misgivings, but having left his home at a very early age, and looking back at it through the "filmy blue" of the past, is by no means prepared for the actual condition of Glenfern. The introduction of the pair to the reality of things takes place as follows:—

"The conversation was interrupted; for just at that moment they had gained the summit of a very high hill, and the post-boy, stopping to give his horses breath, turned round to the carriage, pointing at the same time, with a significant gesture, to a tall thin gray house, something resembling a tower, that stood in the vale beneath. A small sullen-looking lake was in front, on whose banks grew neither tree nor shrub. Behind rose a chain of rugged cloud-capped hills, on the declivities of which were some faint attempts at young plantations; and the only level ground consisted of a few dingy turnip fields, enclosed with stone walls, or dykes, as the post-boy called them. It was now November; the day was raw and cold; and a thick drizzling rain was beginning to fall. A dreary stillness reigned all around, broken only at intervals by the screams of the sea-fowl that hovered over the lake, on whose dark and troubled waters was dimly described a little boat, plied by one solitary being.

"'What a scene!' at length Lady Juliana exclaimed, shuddering as she spoke. 'Good God, what a scene! How I pity the unhappy wretches who are doomed to dwell in

such a place ! and yonder hideous grim house—it makes me sick to look at it. For Heaven’s sake, bid him drive on.’ Another significant look from the driver made the colour mount to Douglas’s cheek, as he stammered out, ‘ Surely it can’t be ; yet somehow I don’t know. Pray, my lad,’ letting down one of the glasses, and addressing the post-boy, ‘ what is the name of that house ?’

MISS  
FERRIER.

“ ‘ Hoose !’ repeated the driver ; ‘ ca’ ye thon a hoose ? Thon’s gude Glenfern Castle.’ ”

Disenchantment follows disenchantment. Glenfern is a sufficiently commodious but quite uncivilised mansion, and its inhabitants consist of the father, a well-meaning chieftain, his three maiden sisters (Miss Jacky, the sensible woman of the parish, Miss Nicky, who is a notable housewife, and Miss Grizzy, who is nothing in particular), and five daughters. The eldest son with his wife abides at a short distance. Very short experience of these circumstances suffices to reduce Lady Juliana to hysterics, which are treated by the aunts in the following fashion :—

“ ‘ Oh, the amiable creature !’ interrupted the unsuspecting spinsters, almost stifling her with their caresses as they spoke : ‘ Welcome, a thousand times welcome, to Glenfern Castle,’ said Miss Jacky, who was esteemed by much the most sensible woman, as well as the greatest orator in the whole parish ; ‘ nothing shall be wanting, dearest Lady Juliana, to compensate for a parent’s rigour, and make you happy and comfortable. Consider this as your future home ! My sisters and myself will be as mothers to you ; and see these charming young creatures,’ dragging forward two tall frightened girls, with sandy hair and great purple arms ; ‘ thank Providence for having blest you with such sisters !’ ”

‘Don’t speak too much, Jacky, to our dear niece at present,’ said Miss Grizzy; ‘I think one of Lady  
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FERRIER. Maclaughlan’s composing draughts would be the best thing for her.’

“‘Composing draughts at this time of day!’ cried Miss Nicky; ‘I should think a little good broth a much wiser thing. There are some excellent family broth making below, and I’ll desire Tibby to bring a few.’

“‘Will you take a little soup, love?’ asked Douglas. His lady assented; and Miss Nicky vanished, but quickly re-entered, followed by Tibby, carrying a huge bowl of coarse broth, swimming with leeks, greens, and grease. Lady Juliana attempted to taste it; but her delicate palate revolted at the homely fare; and she gave up the attempt, in spite of Miss Nicky’s earnest entreaties to take a few more of these excellent family broth.

“‘I should think,’ said Henry, as he vainly attempted to stir it round, ‘that a little wine would be more to the purpose than this stuff.’

“The aunts looked at each other; and, withdrawing to a corner, a whispering consultation took place, in which Lady Maclaughlan’s opinion, ‘birch, balm, currant, heating, cooling, running risks,’ &c., &c., transpired. At length the question was carried; and some tolerable sherry and a piece of very substantial *shortbread* were produced.”

What follows may be guessed without much difficulty, though the recital is well worth reading. Lady Juliana wearies her husband and his relatives with every possible demonstration of insolence and folly. The pipes make her faint; her favourite beasts and birds (which the old-fashioned politeness of the laird and a certain respect for her rank will not permit him to banish) become the nuisances of the house; and though she conde-



scends to stay at Glenfern until she has enriched the family tree with a new generation—  
Major Douglas, the eldest son, has no children—she shows more and more her utter vacuity of mind, her want of real affection for her unlucky husband, and the impossibility of satisfying her by any concessions consistent with the means of the family. After a time, however, a new personage appears on the scene in the person of Lady Maclaughlan, one of the strongest and most original characters who had yet found a home in English fiction. Her defects are two only, that she is admitted to be very nearly a photograph from the life, and that, like too many of the characters of *Marriage*, she has but very little to do with the story. Lady Maclaughlan's humours are almost infinite and can hardly hope to represent themselves in any sufficient manner by dint of extract. She is a sort of cross between Lady Bountiful and Lady Kew, a mixture which will be admitted to be original, especially as one of the component parts had not yet been separately presented at all to the public. This is the fashion of her introduction:—

“Out of this equipage issued a figure, clothed in a light-coloured, large-flowered chintz raiment, carefully drawn through the pocket-holes, either for its own preservation, or the more disinterested purpose of displaying a dark short stuff petticoat, which, with the same liberality, afforded ample scope for the survey of a pair of worsted stockings and black leather shoes, something resembling buckets. A faded red cloth jacket, which bore evident marks of having been severed

from its native skirts, now acted in the capacity of a spencer.

MISS  
FERRIER. On the head rose a stupendous fabric, in the form of a cap, on the summit of which was placed a black beaver hat, tied *à la poissonarde*. A small black satin muff in one hand, and a gold-headed walking-stick in the other, completed the dress and decoration of this personage."

Lady Maclaughlan has a husband (more like one of Smollett's characters than like any other product of English fiction) who is a hopeless cripple, and she is a tyrant to her friends, and especially to "the girls," as she calls the aunts at Glenfern; but she has plenty of brains. An excellent scene, though like many in the book rather of an extravagant kind, is that where the Glenfern party have come to dine with her on a wrong day. They make their way into the house with the utmost difficulty, surprise Sir Sampson Maclaughlan in undress, and only at last are ushered into the redoubtable presence:—

"After ascending several long dark stairs, and following divers windings and turnings, the party at length reached the door of the *sanctum sanctorum*, and having gently tapped, the voice of the priestess was heard in no very encouraging accents, demanding 'Who was there?'

"'It's only us,' replied her trembling friend.

"'Only us? humph! I wonder what fool is called *only us*! Open the door, Philistine, and see what *only us* wants.'

The door was opened and the party entered. The day was closing in, but by the faint twilight that mingled with the gleams from a smoky smouldering fire, Lady Maclaughlan was dimly discernible, as she stood upon the hearth, watching the contents of an enormous kettle that emitted both

steam and odour. She regarded the invaders with her usual marble aspect, and without moving either joint or muscle as they drew near.

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“‘I declare—I don’t think you know us, Lady Maclaughlan,’ said Miss Grizzy in a tone of affected vivacity, with which she strove to conceal her agitation.

“‘Know you!’ repeated her friend—‘humph! Who you are, I know very well; but what brings you here, I do *not* know. Do you know yourselves?’

“‘I declare—I can’t conceive——’ began Miss Grizzy; but her trepidation arrested her speech, and her sister therefore proceeded—

“‘Your ladyship’s declaration is no less astonishing than incomprehensible. We have waited upon you by your own express invitation on the day appointed by yourself; and we have been received in a manner, I must say, we did not expect, considering this is the first visit of our niece Lady Juliana Douglas.’

“‘I’ll tell you what, girls,’ replied their friend, as she still stood with her back to the fire, and her hands behind her; ‘I’ll tell you what,—you are not yourselves—you are all lost—quite mad—that’s all—humph!’

“‘If that’s the case, we cannot be fit company for your ladyship,’ retorted Miss Jacky warmly; ‘and therefore the best thing we can do is to return the way we came. Come, Lady Juliana—come, sister.’

“‘I declare, Jacky, the impetuosity of your temper is—I really cannot stand it——’ and the gentle Grizzy gave way to a flood of tears.

“‘You used to be rational, intelligent creatures,’ resumed her ladyship; ‘but what has come over you, I don’t know. You come tumbling in here at the middle of the night—and at the top of the house—nobody knows how—when I never was thinking of you; and because I don’t tell a parcel of lies, and pretend I expected you, you are for flying off again—humph! Is this the behaviour of women in their senses? But since you are here, you may as well sit down and say



what brought you. Get down, Gil Blas—go along, Tom Jones,' addressing two huge cats, who occupied a three-cornered leather chair by the fireside, and who relinquished it with much reluctance.

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"'How do you do, pretty creature?' kissing Lady Juliana, as she seated her in this cat's cradle. 'Now, girls, sit down, and tell what brought you here to-day—humph!'

"'Can your ladyship ask such a question, after having formally invited us?' demanded the wrathful Jacky.

"'I'll tell you what, girls; you were just as much invited by me to dine here to-day as you were appointed to sup with the Grand Seignior--humph!'

"'What day of the week does your ladyship call this?'

"'I call it Tuesday; but I suppose the Glenfern calendar calls it Thursday: Thursday was the day I invited you to come.'

"'I'm sure—I'm thankful we're got to the bottom of it at last,' cried Miss Grizzy; 'I read it, because I'm sure you wrote it, Tuesday.'

"'How could you be such a fool, my love, as to read it any such thing? Even if it had been written Tuesday, you might have had the sense to know it meant Thursday. When did you know me invite anybody for a Tuesday?'

"'I declare it's very true; I certainly ought to have known better. I am quite confounded at my own stupidity; for as you observe, even though you had said Tuesday, I might have known that you must have meant Thursday.'

"'Well, well, no more about it. Since you are here you must stay here, and you must have something to eat, I suppose. Sir Sampson and I have dined two hours ago; but you shall have your dinner for all that. I must shut shop for this day, it seems, and leave my resuscitating tincture all in the deadthraw—Methusalem pills quite in their infancy. But there's no help for it. Since you are here you must stay here, and you must be fed and lodged; so get along, girls, get along. Here, Gil Blas—come, Tom Jones.' And, preceded by her cats, and followed by her guests, she led the way to the parlour."

The humours of Glenfern and its neighbourhood, however, come to an end before long. MISS  
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The offer of a farm to Harry Douglas by his good-natured old father and his wife's utter horror at the idea, the birth of twin girls for whom their mother entertains no feelings but profound disgust, and the general revolt of the whole family at Lady Juliana are happily succeeded by the relenting of General Cameron. He procures the restoration of the commission, which Douglas has forfeited by breaking his leave, and gives him a handsome allowance. One of the twins is left to the care of Mrs Douglas, the elder brother's wife, the other accompanies her parents to London. But Lady Juliana's senseless folly once more ruins her husband. Her discourtesy to General Cameron alienates him, her insane extravagance far outruns the allowance which even while marrying and disinheriting Harry he does not withhold. Douglas goes on foreign service, and practically nothing more is heard of him. Lady Juliana finds a home with her daughter Adelaide in the house of her brother, who has been deserted by his wife. A long gap occurs in the chronology, and the story is resumed when Adelaide and Mary (whom her mother has practically forgotten) are grown up. It is thought proper (much to Lady Juliana's disgust) that her daughter shall pay her a visit, and the second volume of the novel is occupied by the history of this. On the way to England there is a lively episode in which Mary Douglas is taken

to see an ancient great-aunt in Edinburgh, whose account of the "improvements" of modern days is not a little amusing. Mrs MacShake, indeed, is one of those originals, evidently studies from the life, whom Miss Ferrier could draw with a somewhat malicious but an admirably graphic pen. Similar characters of a redeeming kind in the second part of the book are Dr Redgill, Lord Courtland's house physician, a parasite of a bygone but extremely amusing type, and Lady Emily, Lord Courtland's daughter, who is one of a class of young women of whom for some incomprehensible reason no novelist before Miss Austen dared to make a heroine.\* Mary herself, who is the heroine, is a great trial to the modern reader.

"'I am now to meet my mother!' thought she; and, unconscious of everything else, she was assisted from the carriage, and conducted into the house. A door was thrown open; but shrinking from the glare of light and sound of voices that assailed her, she stood dazzled and dismayed, till she beheld a figure approaching that she guessed to be her mother. Her heart beat violently—a film was upon her eyes—she made an effort to reach her mother's arms, and sank lifeless on her bosom!

"Lady Juliana, for such it was, doubted not but that her daughter was really dead; for though she talked of fainting every hour of the day herself, still what is emphatically called a

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\* Charlotte Grandison, afterwards "Lady G," the comic heroine of Richardson's novel, has sometimes been regarded as Lady Emily's original; and the Lady Honoria of *Cecilia* might have been instanced as a link between them. But Lady Emily is much less of a caricature than either.



*dead-faint* was a spectacle no less strange than shocking to her. She was therefore sufficiently alarmed and overcome to behave in a very interesting manner ; and some yearnings of pity even possessed her heart as she beheld her daughter's lifeless form extended before her—her beautiful, though inanimate features, half hid by the profusion of golden ringlets that fell around her. But these kindly feelings were of short duration ; for no sooner was the nature of her daughter's insensibility ascertained, than all her former hostility returned, as she found every one's attention directed to Mary, and she herself entirely overlooked in the general interest she had excited ; and her displeasure was still further increased as Mary, at length slowly unclosing her eyes, stretched out her hands, and faintly articulated, ' My mother ! ' ”

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In the same way “trembling violently” she is ready to fall upon her sister's neck, a proceeding to which her sister (a young woman leaving something to desire in point of morality, but sensible enough) strongly objects. This second volume includes, besides the capital figure of Dr Redgill (to whom I regret that justice cannot be done by extracts), not a few isolated studies of the ridiculous which can hardly be too highly spoken of. The drawback is that they have no more than the faintest connection with the story as such ; indeed, it can hardly be said that there is any story in *Marriage*. It is a collection of exceedingly clever caricatures, some of which deserve a higher title, and the best of which will rank with the best originals in English fiction.

Six years passed between the appearance of *Marriage* and the appearance of *The Inheritance*.

The practical success of the earlier book may best be judged by the fact that while *Marriage* MISS FERRIER. brought Miss Ferrier in £150, Blackwood, who had published it, gave her more than six times as much for the new novel. For once difference of price and profit corresponded not unduly to difference of merit. The individual studies and characters of *The Inheritance* are as good as those of *Marriage*, while the novel, as a novel, is infinitely better. In her first work the author had been content to string together amusing caricatures or portraits without any but a rudimentary attempt at central interest. *The Inheritance*, if its plot is of no great intricacy (Miss Ferrier was never famous for plots), is at any rate decently *charpenté*, and the excellent studies of character, which make it delightful to read, are bound together with a very respectable cement of narrative. "The Inheritance" is the Earldom and estates of Rossville, which, by a chapter of accidents, devolve on Gertrude St. Clair, the only daughter of a younger and misallied brother of the reigning Earl, as inheritrix presumptive. She and her mother are invited to Rossville Castle, the inhabitants of which are the reigning Earl and his sister, Lady Betty. Lady Betty is a nonentity, Lord Rossville a pompous fool, who delights in his own eloquence.

The Rossville society is completed by three nephews, with one of whom Gertrude is intended to fall in love, with another of whom she ought to

fall in love, and (as a natural consequence) with the third of whom she does fall in love. The remaining characters of the book are more numerous than is the case in *Marriage*, and much better grouped. Miss Pratt, a talkative cousin of the Rossville family, is one of the few characters in Miss Ferrier's books who can afford comparison with those of Miss Austen. She is constantly citing the witticisms of a certain Anthony Whyte, who may be justly said to be an ancestor of Mrs Harris, inasmuch as he is always talked about and never seen. She is also foredoomed to cross the soul of Lord Rossville, whose feelings of decency she outrages by proposing that a large company shall visit his dressing-room, whose elaborate sentences she constantly interrupts, and whom she finally kills, by making her appearance in a hearse, the only vehicle which she has been able to engage to convey her through a snowstorm. The other branch of Gertrude's connections, however, furnish their full share to the gallery of satirical portraits. One of them, the formidable "Uncle Adam," is said to have been drawn from the author's own father, while he has prophetic touches of no less a person than Carlyle. The Blacks, Mrs St. Clair's closest relations, have improved somewhat in circumstances since she made a stolen match with her husband, and they are now on the outskirts of county society. The eldest daughter is engaged to a wealthy and fairly well-connected Nabob,



Major Waddell, and on this unlucky pair Miss  
MISS FERRIER. Ferrier concentrates the whole weight  
 of her sarcasm, especially on Miss Bell  
 Black, the bride elect, who is always talking about  
 "my situation." The gem, however, of this part  
 of the book is the following letter from Lilly Black,  
 the second sister and bridesmaid, who, according  
 to old fashion, accompanies Major and Mrs Waddell  
 on their bridal tour. Jeffrey is said to have ad-  
 mired this particularly, which shows that the awful  
 Aristarch of Craigcrook, when his prejudices were  
 not concerned, and when new planets did not swim  
 too impertinently into his ken, was quite ready to  
 give them welcome.

"The following letters were put into Gertrude's hand one  
 morning. The first she opened was sealed with an ever-  
 green leaf; motto, *Je ne change qu'en mourant*.

"I am inexpressibly pained to think what an opinion my  
 dearest cousin must have formed of me, from having  
 allowed so much time to elapse ere I commenced a  
 correspondence from which, believe me, I expect to derive  
 the most unfeigned and heartfelt delight. But you, my dear  
 friend, whose fate it has been to roam, "and other realms to  
 view," will, I am sure, make allowance for the apparent  
 neglect and unkindness I have been guilty of, which, be  
 assured, was very far from designed on my part. Indeed,  
 scarce a day has elapsed since we parted that I have not  
 planned taking up my pen to address you, and to attempt  
 to convey to you some idea, however faint, of all I have  
 seen and felt since bidding adieu to Caledonia. But, alas!  
 so many of the vulgar cares of life obtrude themselves even  
 here, in "wilds unknown to public view," as have left me  
 little leisure for the interchange of thought.

"Were it not for these annoyances, and the want of a

congenial soul to pour forth my feelings to, I could almost imagine myself in Paradise. *Apropos*, is a certain regiment still at B., and have you got acquainted with any of the officers yet? You will perhaps be tempted to smile at that question; but I assure you there is nothing at all in it. The Major and Bell (or Mrs Major Waddell, as she wishes to be called in future, as she thinks Bell too familiar an appellation for a married woman) are, I think, an uncommon happy attached pair—the only drawback to their happiness is the Major's having been particularly bilious of late, which he ascribes to the heat of the weather, but expects to derive the greatest benefit from the waters of Harrowgate. For my part, I am sure many a "longing lingering look" I shall cast behind when we bid adieu to the sylvan shores of Winander. I have attempted some views of it, which may serve to carry to you some idea of its beauties. One on a watch-paper, I think my most successful effort. The Major has rallied me a good deal as to who that is intended for; but positively that is all a joke, I do assure you. But it is time that I should now attempt to give you some account of my travels, though, as I promise myself the delight of showing you my journal when we meet, I shall omit the detail of our journey, and at once waft you to what I call Lake Land. But where shall I find language to express my admiration!

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“One thing I must not omit to mention, in order that you may be able to conceive some idea of the delight we experienced, and for which we were indebted to the Major's politeness and gallantry. In order to surprise us, he proposed our taking a little quiet sail, as he termed it, on the lake. All was silence; when, upon a signal made, figure to yourself the astonishment and delight of Mrs Major and myself, when a grand flourish of French horns burst upon our ears, waking the echoes all round; the delightful harmony was repeated from every recess which echo haunted on the borders of the lake. At first, indeed, the surprise was almost too much for Mrs Major, and she became a little

hysterical, but she was soon recovered by the Major's tenderness and assurances of safety. Indeed  
MISS he is, without exception, the most exemplary and  
FERRIER. devoted husband I ever beheld ; still I confess  
(but that is *entre nous*), that to me, the little taste he displays for the tuneful Nine would be a great drawback to my matrimonial felicity.

“After having enjoyed this delightful concert, we bade a long adieu to the sylvan shores of Ulls Water, and proceeded to Keswick, or, as it is properly denominated, Derwent Water, which is about three miles long ; its pure transparent bosom, studded with numberless wooded islands, and its sides beautifully variegated with elegant mansions, snow-white cottages, taper spires, pleasant fields, adorned by the hand of cultivation, and towering groves that seem as if impervious to the light of day. The celebrated Fall of Lodore I shall not attempt to depict ; but figure, if you can, a stupendous cataract, rushing headlong over enormous rocks and crags, which vainly seem to oppose themselves in its progress.

“With regret we tore ourselves from the cultivated beauties of Derwent, and taking a look, *en passant*, of the more secluded Grassmere and Rydall, we at length found ourselves on the shores of the magnificent Winander.

“Picture to yourself, if it be possible, stupendous mountains rearing their cloud-capped heads in all the sublimity of horror, while an immense sheet of azure reflected the crimson and yellow rays of the setting sun as they floated o'er its motionless green bosom, on which was impressed the bright image of the surrounding woods and meadows, speckled with snowy cottages and elegant villas ! I really felt as if inspired, so much was my enthusiasm kindled, and yet I fear my description will fail in conveying to you any idea of this never-to-be-forgotten scene. But I must now bid you adieu, which I do with the greatest reluctance. How thought flows upon me when I take up my pen ! how inconceivable to me the distaste which some people express



for letter-writing ! *Scribbling*, as they contemptuously term it. How I pity such vulgar souls ! You, my dear cousin, I am sure, are not one of them. I have scarcely left room for Mrs Major to add a PS. Adieu ! Your affectionate

MISS  
FERRIER.

“ ‘LILLY.’ ”

“ Mrs Waddell’s postscript was as follows :—

“ ‘MA CHERE COUSINE—Of course you cannot expect that I, a married woman, can possibly have much time to devote to my female friends, with an adoring husband, who never stirs from my side, and to whom my every thought is due. But this much, in justice to myself, I think it proper to say, that I am the happiest of my sex, and that I find my Waddell everything generous, kind, and brave !

“ ‘ISABELLA WADDELL.’ ”

There are not many better things than this of the kind, and it is matched by a long passage (too long, unhappily, to quote) as to a certain Miss Becky Duguid, an old maid, and a victim of commissions and such-like sacrifices to friendship. But one passage also dealing with the Black family must be given to show the keenness of Miss Ferrier’s observation, and the neatness of her satirical expression :—

“ Mrs Fairbairn was one of those ladies who, from the time she became a mother, ceased to be anything else. All the duties, pleasures, charities, and decencies of life were henceforth concentrated in that one grand characteristic ; every object in life was henceforth viewed through that single medium. Her own mother was no longer her mother ; she was the grandmother of her dear infants, her brothers and sisters were mere uncles and aunts, and even her husband ceased to be thought of as her husband from

the time he became a father. He was no longer the being who had claims on her time, her thoughts, her talents, her affections ; he was simply Mr Fairbairn, the noun masculine of Mrs Fairbairn, and the father of her children. Happily for Mr Fairbairn, he was not a person of very nice feelings or refined taste ; and although at first he did feel a little unpleasant when he saw how much his children were preferred to himself, yet in time he became accustomed to it, then came to look upon Mrs Fairbairn as the most exemplary of mothers, and finally resolved himself into the father of a very fine family, of which Mrs Fairbairn was the mother. In all this there was more of selfish egotism and animal instinct than of rational affection or Christian principle ; but both parents piqued themselves upon their fondness for their offspring, as if it were a feeling peculiar to themselves, and not one they shared in common with the lowest and weakest of their species. Like them, too, it was upon the bodies of their children that they lavished their chief care and tenderness, for, as to the immortal interests of their souls, or the cultivation of their minds, or the improvement of their tempers, these were but little attended to, at least in comparison of their health and personal appearance."

Such passages are fair, but not extraordinarily favourable examples of the faculty of satire (a little "hard" perhaps, as even her admirers acknowledged it to be, but admirably clear-sighted and felicitous in expression) with which Miss Ferrier illustrated all her novels, and especially this her masterpiece. The general story of *The Inheritance* is, however, quite sufficiently interesting and well-managed, even without the embroidery of character study. Lord Rossville, a well-meaning but short-sighted man, begins to suspect,

rightly enough in general, but wrongly in particular, that his heiress is likely to be disobedient to his desire that she shall marry her cousin (and failing her, his next heir), Mr Delmour, a dull politician. She boldly tells him that she cannot marry Mr Delmour, and he threatens to disinherit her, but before his mind is fully made up he dies suddenly, and she succeeds. Her lover, the younger brother of Mr Delmour, has shown signs of interestedness which might be suspicious to a less guileless person than Gertrude, but the chapter of accidents enables him to regain his position, and he is more attentive than ever to the Countess of Rossville in her own right. Luckily an old promise to her mother prevents her from marrying at once. But at her lover's suggestion she goes up to London, is introduced by him to fashionable society, indulges in all sorts of expense and folly (Miss Ferrier is great on the expense and folly of London life, and the wickedness of absenteeism), and neglects the good works at Rossville, in which the third cousin Lindsay, the virtuous hero of the story, has interested her before. At last she returns to her home, and a storm, which has long been brewing, breaks. A stranger, who has before been introduced as mysteriously threatening and annoying Mrs St. Clair, makes himself more objectionable than ever, forcing his way into the castle, wantonly exhibiting his power over the mother, and through her over her indignant



daughter, and by degrees making himself wholly intolerable. At last the mystery is dismissed. closed. Gertrude is not Countess of Rossville at all, nor even daughter of Mrs St. Clair. She is a supposititious child whom her ambitious mother (so called) has taken for the purpose of foisting her as heiress on the Rossville family. At first it seems as if she were to suffer the intolerable punishment of being handed over to the scoundrel Lewiston as his daughter, but his pretensions to her are so far disproved. *Cetera quis nescit?* The faithless Colonel Delmour flies off, the good Lindsay remains, and a course of accidents replaces Gertrude as mistress (though not in her own right) at Rossville Castle.

*The Inheritance* is a book which really deserves a great deal of praise. Almost the only exceptions to be taken to it are the rather violent alternations of ἀναγνώρισις and περιπέτεια, which lead to the conclusion, and the mismanagement of the figure of Lewiston. This ruffian is represented as a Yankee, but he is not in the least like either the American of history or the conventional Yankee of fiction and the stage. He is clearly a character for whom the author had no type ready in her memory or experience, and whom she consequently invented partly out of her own head and partly from such rather inappropriate stock models of villains as she happened to be acquainted with. He is not probable in himself, nor are his actions probable, for a business-like scoundrel such as he

is represented to be would have known perfectly well that forcing himself into Rossville Castle, and behaving as if it were his own property, was an almost certain method of killing the goose that laid the golden eggs. But these faults are not of the first importance, and the general merits of the book are very great. Gertrude herself is a consistent, lifelike, and agreeable character, neither too sentimental nor too humoursome, but perfectly human; all the other characters group well round her, and as for the merely satirical passages and personages they are wholly admirable.

*The Inheritance* was more popular even than *Marriage* had been; but the author still refused to be hurried into production. She had always been very coy about acknowledging her work—all her books were published anonymously—and she was accustomed to write (though that operation may seem a harmless one enough) with as much secrecy as Miss Austen herself observed. But Sir Walter Scott was taken into confidence as to the publication of *Destiny*, and through his good offices with Cadell she obtained a much larger sum for it than she had hitherto received. The book is an advance even upon *The Inheritance*, and much more upon *Marriage*, in unity and completeness of plot, and it contains two or three of Miss Ferrier's most elaborate and finished pictures of oddities. But, as it seems to me, there is a considerable falling off in *verve* and spontaneity.

The story-interest of the book centres on the fortunes of Glenroy, a Highland chief-tain of large property, and his daughter Edith. In former days an appanage of considerable extent has been carved out of the Glenroy property, and this at the date of the story has fallen in to a distant relation of the family, who is childless, and who visits the country for the first time. Glenroy, petty tyrant though he is at home, condescends to court this kinsman for the sake of his inheritance. The old man, however, who is both ill-natured and parsimonious, and who is revolted by the luxurious waste of Glenroy's household, leaves the property, under rather singular conditions, to certain poor relations of Glenroy's, Ronald Malcolm, a boy about the same age as the chief's son, Norman, and his nephew, Reginald, being the special heir. This boy goes to sea, and what may be called one branch of the plot concerns his disappearance and his unwillingness, by making himself known after a long absence, to oust his father from the property (as under the settlement he would be obliged to do). The other branch, which is reunited with this first branch rather adroitly, springs in this wise. Glenroy, somewhat late in life, and after the birth of his children Norman and Edith, has married Lady Elizabeth Waldegrave, a reproduction of Lady Juliana in *Marriage*. She has one daughter, who, by the death of relations, becomes a peeress in her own right (Miss Ferrier,



it will be observed, has a genuinely Scotch objection to limiting the descent of honours to heirs male), and Lady Elizabeth <sup>MISS</sup> <sup>FERRIER.</sup> having quarrelled with her husband, is very glad to take her daughter Florinda away with her. Only after many years does she return, and the rivalry (unconscious on Edith's part) between Glenroy's daughter and the English peeress for the hand of Reginald gives rise to some good scenes. Norman Malcolm, the heir, has died already, and after a short period of dotage Glenroy himself follows, leaving his daughter totally unprovided for, in consequence of his belief in her approaching marriage to Reginald, on whom the estates devolve. Edith's subsequent fortunes (for, as may be readily imagined, the beautiful and wealthy Florinda carries the day); her stay with some Cockney connections of her mother's; the unlucky relations (again much copied from *Marriage*) of Reginald and Florinda, all lead up to the final reappearance of Ronald and the necessary marriage bells.

The lighter dishes of this particular banquet consist of a *Hausfranzösin*, Madame Latour (who is perhaps somewhat indebted to Miss Edgeworth, though there are suspicions of a personal model and victim here as elsewhere); of the Cockney pair, Mr and Mrs Ribley, amusing but conventional; of the chief's two dependants and butts, Benbowie, a cocklaird of his own clan, and Mrs Macaulay, a good-hearted, poor relation, who plays the mother

to Edith; and, above all, of Mr McDow, the minister of the parish. This last portrait  
MISS FERRIER. is a satire of what Dryden called the  
“bloody” kind (the same word in the same sense is used to this day in the politest French, and I do not know why English should be more squeamish), on the foibles of the Presbyterian clergy. Jeffrey is said to have pronounced Mr McDow an entire and perfect chrysolite. With his “moderate” opinions, his constant hunger and thirst after decreets and augmentations (it may be explained to those who do not know Scotland that a minister of the Established Church, unlike his English compeer, is enabled, if he chooses, to be a perpetual thorn in the sides of the owners of real property in his parish by claims for increased stipend, repairs to the manse, &c.), his vulgarity, his stupid jokes, his unfailing presence as an uninvited guest at every feast, there is no doubt of the truth of the picture or of the strength of the satire. But Miss Ferrier occasionally lets her acid bite a little too deeply, and it may be thought that she has done this here. Mr McDow has the same fault as some of Flaubert’s characters—he is too uniformly disgusting. A testimonial to this man, who is a model, be it remembered, of coarseness, ignorance, stupidity, and selfish neglect of his duties, is a good specimen of the sharp strokes which Miss Ferrier constantly dealt to the vices and follies of society—strokes sharper perhaps than any lady novelist has cared or known how to aim:—

“MY DEAR SIR—It is with the most unfeigned satisfaction I take up my pen to bear my public testimony to worth such as yours, enriched and adorned as it is with abilities of the first order—polished and refined by all that learning can bestow. From the early period at which our friendship commenced few, I flatter myself, can boast of a more intimate acquaintance with you than myself; but such is the retiring modesty of your nature, that I fear, were I to express the high sense I entertain of your merit, I might wound that delicacy which is so prominent a feature in your character. I shall therefore merely affirm, that your talents I consider as of the very highest order; your learning and erudition are deep, various, and profound; while your scholastic researches have ever been conducted on the broad basis of Christian moderation and gentlemanly liberality. Your doctrines I look upon as of the most sound, practical description, calculated to superinduce the clearest and most comprehensive system of Christian morals, to which your own character and conduct afford an apt illustration. As a preacher, your language is nervous, copious, and highly rhetorical; your action in the pulpit free, easy, and graceful. As a companion, your colloquial powers are of no ordinary description, while the dignity of your manners, combined with the suavity of your address, render your company universally sought after in the very first society. In short, to sum up the whole, I know no man more likely than yourself to adorn the gospel, both by your precept and example. With the utmost esteem and respect,

MISS  
FERRIER.

“I am, dear Sir,

“Most faithfully and sincerely yours,

“RODERICK M'CRAW,

“*Professor of Belles Lettres.*”

*Destiny* was published in 1831, and was its author's last work. Nothing else from her pen



has been published to my knowledge, except certain brief reminiscences of visits to  
MISS FERRIER. Ashestiel and Abbotsford, and the letters above referred to. Her silence was not owing to want of invitation to write, for London publishers offered her handsome terms; but she could not please herself with any idea that occurred to her, and accordingly declined the offers. Indeed, there are not, I think, wanting signs in *Destiny* that a fourth book would have been a failure. She was no longer young; her stock of originals, taken *sur le vif*, was probably exhausted; her old sarcastic pleasure in cynical delineation was giving way to a somewhat pietistic view of things which is very noticeable in her last novel; and, to crown all, she was in failing health and suffered especially from impaired eyesight. Yet she survived the publication of *Destiny* for nearly a quarter of a century, and did not die till November, 1854, at the age of seventy-two.

Miss Ferrier's characteristics as a novelist are well marked and not likely to escape any reader. But nothing brings them out so clearly as the inevitable comparison with her great contemporary, Miss Austen. Of the many divisions which may be made between different classes of fiction writers, there is one which is perhaps as clearly visible, though it is perhaps not so frequently drawn, as any. There is one set of novelists (Le Sage, Fielding, Thackeray, Miss Austen, are among its most illustrious names) whose work always seems

like a section of actual life, with only the necessary differentia of artistic treatment. MISS  
There is another, with Balzac and FERRIER.  
Dickens for its most popular exponents, and Balzac alone for its greatest practitioner, whose work, if not false, is always more or less abnormal. In the one case the scenes on the stage are the home, the forum, the streets which all know or might have known if they had lived at the time and place of the story. These writers have each in his or her own degree something of the universality and truth of Shakespeare. No special knowledge is needed to appreciate them; no one is likely in reading them to stop himself to ask—Is this possible or probable? In the other case the spectator is led through a series of museums, many if not most of the objects in which are extraordinary specimens, “sports,” monstrosities; while some, perhaps, are like the quaint creations of Waterton’s fancy and ingenuity—something more than monsters, mere deliberate things of shreds and patches more or less cleverly made to look as if they might have been at some time or other *viabiles*. Of these two schools, Miss Ferrier belongs to the last, though she is not by any means an extreme practitioner in it. A moment’s thought will show that the system on relying for the most part on thumb-nail sketches which she avowedly practised leads to this result. Not only is the observer prompted to take the most strongly marked and eccentric specimens in his

or her range of observation, but in copying them the invariable result of imitation, the deepening of the strokes, and the hardening of the lines, leads to further departure from the common form. These eccentricities, too, whether copied or imagined, fit but awkwardly into any regular plot. The novelist is as much tempted to let her story take care of itself while she is emphasising her "humours" as another kind of novelist is tempted to let it take care of itself while he is discoursing to his readers about his characters, or about things in general. Hence the sort of writing which was Miss Ferrier's particular *forte* leads to two inconveniences—the neglect of a congruous and sufficient central interest, and the paying of disproportionate attention to minor characters. The contrast, therefore, even of *The Inheritance* with, let us say, *Pride and Prejudice*, is a curious one, and no reader can miss the want in the later book of the wonderful perspective and proportion, the classical avoidance of exaggeration, which mark Miss Austen's masterpiece. On the other hand, it is interesting enough to let the imagination attempt to conceive what Miss Ferrier would have made of Lady Catherine, of Mr Collins, of the Meryton vulgarities. The satire would be as sharp, but it would be rougher, the instrument would be rather a saw than a razor, and the executioner would linger over her task with a certain affectionate forgetfulness that she had other things to do than to vivisect.



Nor shall we find it uninteresting to extend the comparison to the third contemporary, MISS FERRIER. who, by a singular coincidence, completes with Miss Austen and Miss Ferrier the trinity of English, Scotch, and Irish lady novelists of the opening of this century. Miss Edgeworth (on whose *Patronage* a rather direct critique exists in one of Miss Ferrier's letters) had far more geniality, a more fertile brain, and a wider and more catholic range of interests and sympathies than her Scotch sister: but it is fair to say that no one of her books is so good as *The Inheritance*, and that several of them are much worse than either *Marriage* or *Destiny*.

Notwithstanding these drawbacks, notwithstanding her admitted inability to manage pathos (which in her hands becomes mere *sensibilité* of an obviously unreal kind), and lastly, notwithstanding her occasional didactic passages which are simply a bore, Miss Ferrier is an admirable novelist, especially for those who can enjoy unsparing social satire and a masterly faculty of caricature. She writes, as far as mere writing goes, well, and not unfrequently exceedingly well. It is obvious, not so much from her quotations, for they are dubious evidence, but from the general tone of her work that she was thoroughly well read. There are comparatively few Scotticisms in her, and she has a knack of dry sarcasm which continues the best traditions of the eighteenth century in its freedom from mere quaintness and

grotesque. The character of Glenroy at the beginning of *Destiny* is nearly as well written  
MISS FERRIER. as St Evremond himself could have done it, and the sentence which concludes it is a good example of its manner. "As it was impossible, however, that any one so great in himself could make a great marriage, his friends and followers, being reasonable people, merely expected that he would make the best marriage possible." This little sentence, with the admirable piece of *galimatias* in Mrs St. Clair's interview with Lord Rossville, and the description in *Marriage* of Miss Becky Douglas's arms as "strapped back by means of a pink ribbon of no ordinary strength or doubtful hue," are examples taken at random of the verbal shafts which Miss Ferrier scatters all about her pages to the great delight of those who have alertness of mind enough to perceive, and good taste or ill-nature enough (for both explanations may be given) to enjoy them.

Her main claim, however, to be read is unquestionably in her gallery of originals, or (as it has been, with the dispassionateness of a critic who does not want to make his goose too much of a swan, called) her museum of abnormalities. They may or may not have places assigned to them rather too prominent for the general harmony of the picture. They may or may not be exaggerated. There may or may not be a certain likeness to the fiendish conduct of the ancestor of the author's

friend, Lord Cassilis, in the manner in which she carefully oils them, and as carefully disposes them on the gridiron for roasting. MISS  
FERRIER.

But they are excellent company. The three aunts, Lady Maclaughlan, Mrs MacShake, Dr Redgill, and in a minor degree the Bath *Précieuses* in *Marriage*, Lord Rossville, Miss Pratt, Adam Ramsay, and above all "Mrs Major" in *The Inheritance*, Molly Macaulay, Mr McDow, and the Ribleys, in *Destiny*, are persons with whom the reader is delighted to meet, sorry to part, and (if he have any affection for good novels) certain to meet again. When it is added that though she does not often indulge it, Miss Ferrier possesses a remarkable talent for description, it will be seen that she has no mean claims. Indeed, of the four requisites of the novelist, plot, character, description, and dialogue, she is only weak in the first. The lapse of an entire half-century and a complete change of manners have put her books to the hardest test they are ever likely to have to endure, and they come through it triumphantly.



## VI.

### ENGLISH WAR-SONGS—CAMPBELL.

IT has been admitted by a rather reluctant world,  
—at least since the days of Marmontel  
WAR SONGS. who gave three particularly exquisite  
reasons for the fact—that the English excel in  
poetry; and it is most scholastically true that  
he who excels in a subject shows his excellence  
best in treating the best parts thereof. Now of  
ancient times it has been laid down in various  
fashions that the two things best worth doing  
in this world are fighting and love-making; and  
though the curious little sectarian heresy which  
calls itself the Modern Spirit no doubt regards  
the doctrine as a barbarous and exploded crudity,  
it is not at all improbable that it may see many  
Modern Spirits out. Therefore poetry being, as  
we have all learnt, a criticism of life, and these  
two things being at least among the most notable  
and interesting things of life, it will follow that  
poetry will busy itself best with them. Further  
yet, I have been told that the natives of India,

who have had some opportunity of observing us, declare that an Englishman is never happy unless he is doing either one or the other,—sport being included as partaking of both. Therefore, yet once more, we shall conclude that English poetry ought to sing well about them.

As a matter of fact it does. With the one branch we have nothing here to do, and indeed no human being could discuss it in the compass of a single essay. The War-song or War-poem, however, is by no means so unmanageable, and with it I may attempt to deal. And let it be stated at the outset that, if I do not begin at what some excellent persons think the beginning, it is not out of any intention to insult them. There is good fighting in Beowulf; but the average Englishman (I think not thereby forfeiting his national claim to good sense) absolutely declines to regard as English a language scarcely a word of which he can understand. For my own part, I cannot see why if I am to draw on this Jutish Saga (or whatever it is) I may not equally well reach my hand to the shelf behind me, take down my *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, and draw on that; of which things there were no end. Therefore let these matters, and the Song of Brunanburh, and all the rest of it, be uncontentiously declined, and let us start from what the plain man does recognise as English, that is to say from Chaucer.

I have elsewhere\* ventured to question the

\* See *Twenty Years of Political Satire*, p. 237.

wisdom of making pretty philosophical explanations of literary phenomena, and I do not  
 WAR SONGS. purpose to spend much time in asking why in the earliest English poetry (as just defined) there is hardly anything that comes within our subject. Five very simple and indisputable facts,—that our Norse ancestors fought and sang of fighting, both in the most admirable fashion; that the great heroes of the Hundred Years War did not apparently care to sing about fighting at all; that Elizabeth's wars gave us indirectly one of the few war-songs of the first class, Drayton's *Ballad of Agincourt*; that the English *Tyrtæus* during the desperate and glorious War of the Spanish Succession could get no further than Addison's *Campaign*; and that the Revolutionary struggle drew from a poet, not exactly of the first rank, three such masterpieces as *Hohenlinden*, *Ye Mariners of England*, and *The Battle of the Baltic*—five such facts as these, I think, should deter any one who has not a mere mania for reason-making from indulging in that process on this subject. The facts are the facts. There is much excellent literary description of fighting in Chaucer, but it is distinctly literary; there is nothing of the personal joy of battle in it. Eustache Deschamps was an infinitely inferior poet to Master Geoffrey, yet there is far more of the real thing in this particular way in *Car France est cimetière des Anglois*, than in any poetical compatriot and contemporary of the conquerors of Cressy. In the next century we have,



so far as I know, nothing at all to match the admirable anonymous *War-song of Fer-rand de Vaudemont*, which may be <sup>WAR SONGS.</sup> found in M. Gaston Paris' *Chansons Populaires*, and other anthologies. The Scotch literary poets are a little better, if not very much; but if we could attach any definite date to most of the Border and other ballads, we should be able to say when some of the most admirable fighting poetry in the world was written. Most of them, however, are so thoroughly shot and veined with modern touches that no man can tell where to have them. For the actual spirit of mortal combat it is probably impossible to surpass the two stanzas in "Helen of Kirkconnell."

As I went down the water side,  
None but my foe to be my guide,  
None but my foe to be my guide  
On fair Kirkconnell Lea.

I lighted down my sword to draw,  
I hachéd him in pieces sma',  
I hachéd him in pieces sma',  
For her sake that died for me !

There is real *Berserk-gang* there: and yet the poem, and even the passage, distinctly shows the influence of the Eighteenth century, to say no more. In its present cast and shape the whole of this ballad-question is a mere labyrinth. I do not know a more disheartening study than that of Professor Child's magnificent volumes, with their

endless variants, which make a canonical text impossible. Therefore, despite the admirable fighting that there is in them, they will help us little.

WAR SONGS. Skelton Skeltonises in this as in other styles; but the *Ballad of the Doughty Duke of Albany and his Hundred Thousand Scots* is a mere piece of doggrel brag, utterly unworthy of the singer of *My Maiden Isabel* or even of the author of *Elinor Running*. The honour of composing the first modern English war-song has been recently, and I think rightly, given to Humphrey Giffard, whose *Posy of Gilloflowers*, published in 1580, just before the overture of the "melodious bursts that fill The spacious times of great Elizabeth," contains a quaint and rough but really spirited piece, *To Soldiers*, in this remarkable metre:

The time of war is come, prepare your corslet, spear and shield;  
Methinks I hear the drum strike doleful marches to the field,  
Tantara, tantara the trumpets sound, which makes men's hearts with joy abound:

The warning guns are heard afar and every thing announces war.  
Serve God, stand stout: bold courage brings this gear about;  
Fear not, forth run: faint heart fair lady never won.

This, it must be admitted needs a good deal of licking into shape as regards form,—as regards spirit it has the root of the matter in it. Nor does

the quaint prosaic alloy which so frequently affects the English as compared with the Scotch ballad prevent *The Brave Lord Willoughby* from being a most satisfactory document. The businesslike statement how, after that unluxurious meal of dead horses and puddle-water,

Then turning to the Spaniards  
A thousand more they slew,

is no doubt destitute enough of the last indefinable touch which can transform words quite as simple and inornate into perfect poetry. But it misses it very narrowly, and almost provides a substitute by its directness and force.

I do not know, however, that the real joy of the thing is to be found anywhere before that wondrous *Battle of Agincourt to the brave Cambro-Britons and their Harp*, which Michael Drayton, an Englishman of Englishmen and a poet whose enormous versatility and copiousness have caused him to be rated rather too low than too high, produced in the early years of the seventeenth century. With the very first lines of it the fit reader must feel that there is no mistake possible about this fellow :

Fair stood the wind for France  
When we our sails advance,  
Nor now to prove our chance  
Longer would tarry :  
But putting to the main,  
At Caux, the mouth of Seine,  
With all his martial train  
Landed King Harry.



There is no precedent for that dash and rush of metre; and if we look for followers it will bear the contrast as happily. The most graceful and scholarly poet of America, the greatest master of harmonies born in England during the present century, have imitated it. If *The Skeleton in Armour* is delightful, and *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (with its slight change of centre of gravity in the rhythm) consummate, what shall be said of this original of both? I know an enthusiast who declared that he would have rather written the single line "Lopped the French lilies" than any even in English poetry except a few of Shakespeare's. This was doubtless delirium, though not of the worst kind. But the intoxication of the whole piece is almost unmatched. The blood stirs all through as you read:

With Spanish yew so strong  
 Arrows a cloth-yard long  
 That like to serpents stung  
     Piercing the weather :  
 None from his fellow starts,  
 But playing manly parts  
 And like true English hearts  
     Stuck close together.

I always privately wish that he had written *Shot close together*, but why gild the lily? Still better is that gorgeous stanza of names:

Warwick in blood did wade,  
 Oxford the foe invade,  
 And cruel slaughter made  
     Still as they ran up :

Suffolk his axe did ply,  
Beaumont and Willoughby  
Bare them right doughtily,  
Ferrers and Fanhope.

WAR SONGS.

For some time it seemed as though the question with which the poem closes :

Oh ! when shall English men  
With such acts fill a pen ?

was to be answered rather by the acts than by the pen. As few songs as triumphs wait on a civil war, and though Montrose might have done the thing he did not. The dishonest combats of the seventeenth century had to wait a couple of hundred years for their laureate and then he appeared on the wrong side. For even Mr Browning's *Cavalier Tunes* are not as good as *The Battle of Naseby*, which, Cavalier as I am, I wish I could think was "pinchbeck." No man perhaps ever lived who had more of the stuff of a Tyrtæus in him than Dryden ; but his time gave him absolutely no subjects of an inspiring nature, and did not encourage him to try any others. The *Annus Mirabilis* is fine enough in all conscience ; but *Come if you dare*, and parts of *Alexander's Feast* show what might have been if the course of events had been more favourable. To tell the honest truth, the cause was generally too bad in those fights with the Dutch, and the fights themselves (though we very properly call them victories) were too near being defeats, to breathe much vigour into the sacred bard ; while for some fifty

years of Glorious John's manhood, from the battle of the Dunes to his death, there was  
WAR SONGS. no land fighting that could at once cheer an Englishman and commend itself to a Jacobite. In luckier circumstances Dryden was the very man to have bettered Drayton and anticipated Campbell.

When he was dead there was no more question of anything of the kind for a very long time. The Angel passage in Mr Addison's poem is undoubtedly a very fine one; I am exceedingly sorry for any one who doubts or does not see that. But the essence of a war-song or even a war-poem is that it should stir the blood; and this stirs it just to the extent that is necessary to secure the *σοφῶς*, in the sense of "Bravo," which Martial tells us Roman reciters earned. It was really a pity. Cutts is not such a pretty name as Ferrers or Fanhope; but "the Salamander" did deeds of arms of which not the greatest of bards need have disdained to be laureate. Blenheim was most undoubtedly a famous victory: the fighting, such as there was of it, at Ramillies was of the best kind; and as for Malplaquet, it ranks for sheer dingdong fighting, and on a far larger scale, with Albuera or Inkerman. But sing these things our good fathers could not. Yet they tried in all conscience. It is a rough, but very sufficient test to take the copious anthology of anthologies which Mr Bullen has recently edited in half-a-dozen volumes for the beginning of the seventeenth



century and the last years of the sixteenth, the collections variously called *Musarum Deliciæ* and the *State Poems* for the middle of seventeenth, and the odd sweeping together of poetry, sculduddery, music, doggrel Verse of Society and what-not which Tom D'Urfey made out of the songs of his time for the end of the Seventeenth and the beginning of the Eighteenth. In the first and second divisions we shall find hardly any warlike verse ; the third bristles with it.

The six volumes of the *Pills to Purge Melancholy* lie beside me as I write, plumed with paper slips which I have put in them to mark pieces of this sort. The badness of them (a few lines of Dryden's, and one or two not his, excepted) is simply astounding, even to those who have pretty well fathomed already the poetic depths of the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth centuries. They cover the whole period of William of Orange's stout if not successful fights, and of the almost unparalleled triumphs of Marlborough ; yet there is never a touch of inspiration. The following is on the whole a really brilliant specimen :

Health to the Queen ! then straight begin  
 To Marlborough the Great and to brave Eugene,  
 With them let valiant Webb come in,  
     Who lately performed a wonder.  
 Then to the ocean an offering make,  
 And boldly carouse to brave Sir John Leake,  
 Who with mortar and cannon Mahon did take  
     And made the Pope knock under.

Here is an effort on Oudenarde :

WAR SONGS. Sing mighty Marlborough's story !  
Men of the field,  
He passes the shield,  
And to increase his glory,  
The French all fly or yield.  
Vendosme drew out to spite him  
Th' Household troops to fright him,  
Princes o' the blood  
Got off as best they cou'd  
And ne'er durst return to fight him.

Malplaquet inspires a yet nobler strain :

Mounsieur ! Mounsieur ! Leave off Spain !  
To think to hold it is in vain,  
Thy warriors are too few.  
Thy Martials must be new,  
Worse losses will ensue,  
Then without more ado  
Be wise and call home petite Anjou !

At a still earlier period "The two Glorious Victories at Donawert and Hochstet" had stirred up somebody to write, to a tune by Mr Corbet, Pindaricks to this effect :

Old Lewis, must thy frantic riot  
Still all Europe vex ?  
Methinks 'tis high time to be quiet  
Now at sixty-six.

There is a little more spirit in a ditty beginning :

From Dunkirk one night they stole out in a fright—  
but it is political rather than battailous ; and for

a purely and wholly deplorable failure of combined loyal and Bacchanalian verse, I hardly know the equal of the following : WAR SONGS.

Then welcome from Vigo  
 And cudgelling Don Diego,  
 With——rascalion  
 And plundering the galleons.  
 Each brisk valiant fellow  
 Fought at Redondellow,  
 And those who did meet  
 With the Newfoundland fleet.  
 Then for late successes  
 Which Europe confesses  
 At land by our gallant Commanders,  
 The Dutch in strong beer  
 Should be drunk for one year  
 With their Generals' health in Flanders !

I do not know how long the reader's patience will hold out against this appalling doggrel, which represents the efforts of the countrymen of Shakespeare and Shelley under the influence of victories which might have made a Campbell of "hoarse Fitzgerald." There is plenty more if any one likes it. I can tell him how the victory over the Turks proved that

Christians thus with conquest crowned,  
 Conquest with the glass goes round,  
 Weak coffee can't keep its ground  
 Against the force of claret.

How

The Duke then to the wood did come  
 In hopes Vendosme to meet,  
 When lo ! the Prince of Carignan  
 Fell at his Grace's feet.



Oh, gentle Duke, forbear ! forbear !  
Into that wood to shoot,  
WAR SONGS. If ever pity moved your Grace  
But turn your eyes and look !

This is an extract taken from a delightful ballad in which the historical facts of Oudenarde are blended quaintly with the Babes in the Wood. Then we hear how

The conquering genius of our isle returns  
Inspired by Ann the godlike hero burns.

We are told of Marlborough himself

Thus as his sprightly infancy was still inured to harms,  
So was his noble figure still adorned with double charms.

While the selection may be appropriately finished by the exordium of an indignant bard who cries—

Ulm is gone,  
But basely won,  
And treacherous Bavaria there has buried his renown :  
That stroling Prince  
Who few years since  
Was crammed with William's gold !

Macaulay, who read everything at some time or other, had probably not read these when he wrote on Addison, or he would have selected some of them to point still further the contrast of *The Campaign*. The poor man who wrote about the "capering beast" was a genius compared to most of the known or unknown authors of these marvellous exertations, which would seem to have been

composed after the effusion of liquor they generally recommend.

Few glories attended the British arms, WAR SONGS.  
on land and in Europe, from the setting of Corporal John's star to the rising of that of "the Duke"; but the true singer, if he had been anywhere about, might have found plenty of employment with the Navy. Unfortunately he was not, and his substitutes preferred to write *Admiral Hosier's Ghost*, or else melancholy lines like those of Langhorne, which no human being would now remember if Scott had not as a boy remembered them in the presence of Burns.

This last name brings us to a poet who ought to have sung of war even better than he did. As it is, there is as little mistake possible about *Scots Wha Hae*, as about *Agincourt*, or *Ye Mariners of England*; while for compressed and undiluted fire it has the advantage of both. It is characteristic, however, of the unlucky rant about freedom which Burns had got into his head, that the "chains and slavery" (which really were very little ones) play an even more prominent part than that pure and generous desire to thrash the person opposed to you, because he is opposed to you, because he is not "your side," which is the true motive of all the best war-songs. This (though in neither example is there equal poetical merit) is more perceptible in the light but capital "I am a Son of Mars" of the *Jolly Beggars*, and in those delightful verses of "Scotch Drink," which so did shock

the delicate nerves of Mr Matthew Arnold, and so do shock still the sensitive conscience  
WAR SONGS. of the modern person, who thinks war a dreadful thing, and carnage anything but God's daughter.

Our chief writer of war-songs, however (for Dibdin's capital songs are not quite such capital poetry), is beyond doubt or question Thomas Campbell; and a very hard nut is the said Thomas for "scientific" criticism to crack. He certainly belonged to a warlike family of a warlike nation; but he shared this advantage with some millions of other Scotchmen, and some thousands of other Campbells. His father, whose youngest child he was, and who was sixty-seven when Thomas was born on July 27, 1777, was a Glasgow merchant, and he himself began life in a merchant's office. The "esthopsychological" (Heaven save us!) determining cause of his temperament is not precisely or eminently apparent. He was not, as Burns was, of a romantic or adventurous disposition, being all his life a quiet, literary gentleman. He was tolerably prosperous, despite his being an excessively bad arithmetician and husband of his money. He had, after early struggles as a tutor, a copying clerk and otherwise, a nice little pension (1805), a nicer little legacy (nay, several), some lucrative appointments and commissions. He lived chiefly at Sydenham and Boulogne (where, on June 15, 1844, he died),



though on his travels in Germany (in the dividing year of the centuries) he did hear, and even perhaps see, shots fired in anger. WAR SONGS.

He also possessed at one period three hundred pounds in bank-notes rolled up in his slippers. He was not ungenerously devoted to port wine, was somewhat less generously *not* devoted to his poetical rivals, was well looked after by his wife (his cousin Matilda Sinclair) while she lived, and afterwards by a niece. He died on the verge of three score years and ten, if not an exceedingly happy or contented, yet on the whole a sufficiently fortunate man.

He was especially fortunate in this, that probably no man ever gained so early and kept so long such high literary rank on the strength of so small a literary performance. In the very year of his reaching man's estate, the *Pleasures of Hope* seated him at once on the Treasury Bench in the contemporary session of the Poets, and unlike most occupants of Treasury Benches, he was never turned off. Many far greater poets appeared during the nearly fifty years which passed between that time and his death; but they were greater in perfectly different fashions. That what may be called his official, and what may be called his real titles to his position were not the same, may be very freely granted. But he had real titles. The curious thing is that even the official titles were so very modest in volume. Setting his *Specimens* aside, all his

literary work (which is not in itself very large) outside the covers of his Poems is as  
WAR SONGS. nearly as possible valueless. For some considerable time he was a journalist, and in later life he was for some ten years editor of the *New Monthly Magazine*, with a fair income, and very little to do. In 1806 he compiled *The Annals of Great Britain from the Accession of George II. to the Peace of Amiens*, a work I have no doubt of the soundest Whig principles, but one which I confess I have never read. Much later he wrote or compiled divers *Lives of Petrarch*, of *Frederick the Great* (tenderly handled as from Whig to Whig in Macaulay's Essay), of *Mrs Siddons*. He was Perpetual Chairman of the Friends of Poland, and thrice Rector of the University of Glasgow. He thought at least that he originated the University of London.

The Poems themselves, the work of a long lifetime, do not fill three hundred small pages, and those of them which are really worth much, would not, I think, be very tightly packed in thirty. The *Pleasures of Hope* itself (published in April 1799, welcomed with extraordinary warmth, and having the good luck to precede by some years the new Renaissance of poetry in England) is beyond doubt the best of that which I should *not* include. It is one of the very best school exercises ever written; it has touches which only a school-boy of genius could

achieve. But higher than a school exercise it cannot be ranked. The other longer poems are far below it. *Gertrude of* <sup>WAR SONGS.</sup>

*Wyoming* (1809) has several famous and a smaller number of excellent lines ; but it is as much of an artificial conglomerate, and as little of an original organism as the *Pleasures of Hope*, and the choice of the Spenserian stanza is simply disastrous. "Iberian seemed his boot," the boot of the hero to the eyes of the heroine ! To think that a man should, in a stanza consecrated to the very quintessence of poetical poetry—a stanza in which, far out of its own period and in mid-Eighteenth century, Thomson had written the *Castle of Indolence*, in which, before Campbell's own death, Mr Tennyson was to write the *Lotos Eaters*,—deliver himself of the phrase, "Iberian seemed his boot" !

But by so much as *Gertrude of Wyoming* is worse than the *Pleasures of Hope* by as much is *Theodric* (1824) worse than *Gertrude of Wyoming*, and the *Pilgrim of Glencoe* (1842) worse again than *Theodric*. There are not more than five or six hundred lines, including as usual some good ones, in *Theodric* ; but though I have just re-read it before writing this I have only the dimmest idea of what really happens. *Theodric* makes love to two young women, a most reprehensible though not uncommon practice, and they both die. One is named Constance and



the other Julia : and the last lines of Constance's  
last letter to Theodric are rather pretty.  
WAR SONGS. She bids him not despair :

I ask you by our love to promise this  
And kiss these words, where I have left a kiss ;  
The latest from my living lips to yours.

But they are quite the best in the poem, which is too short to have any narrative interest, and too long to possess any other. Of the *Pilgrim of Glencoe* it is enough to say that the most enthusiastic Campbellites have seldom been able to say a word for it, that it is rather in Crabbe's style than in the author's own, and that Crabbe has not to my knowledge ever written anything so bad as a whole.

Even when we come to the shorter poems (which were mostly written before *Gertrude of Wyoming*) almost endless exclusions and allowances have to be made. Campbell has left some exceedingly pretty love-songs, not I think very generally known, the best of which are "Withdraw not yet those Lips and Fingers," and "How Delicious is the Winning." But there is no great originality about them, and they are such things as almost any man with a good ear and an extensive knowledge of English poetry could write nearly as well. Almost everything (I think everything) of his that is really characteristic and really great is comprised in the dozen poems as his works are usually arranged (I quote the Aldine Edition)

between *O'Connor's Child* and the *Soldier's Dream*, with the addition of the translated song of Hybrias the Cretan and, if anybody <sup>WAR SONGS.</sup> likes, *The Last Man*. Even here the non-war-like poems cannot approach the war-like ones in merit. The fighting passages of *O'Connor's Child* itself are much the best. *Glenara* (which by the way ends with a line of extraordinary imbecility) is not a very great thing except in the single touch,

Each mantle unfolding a dagger displayed.

*The Exile of Erin* is again merely pretty, and I should not myself care to preserve a line of *Lord Ullin's Daughter* except the really magnificent phrase

And in the scowl of Heaven each face  
Grew dark as they were speaking.

As a whole the *Lines written on revisiting a Scene in Argyleshire*, with their admirable picture of the forsaken garden, seem to me the best thing Campbell did out of the fighting vein.

But in that vein how different a man was he! As a mere boy he had tried it, or something like it, feebly enough in *The Wounded Hussar*; and he showed what he could do in it, even when the subject did not directly touch his imagination, by his spirited paraphrase of the Hybrias fragment. His devotion to the style (which appears even in pieces ostensibly devoted to quite different

subjects such as the *Ode to Winter*) is all the more remarkable that Campbell was a WAR SONGS. staunch member of that political party in England which hated the war. But it was a clear case of over-mastering idiosyncrasy. It is an odd criticism of the late Mr Allingham's (to be matched, however, with several others in his remarks on Campbell) that the selection in the *Specimens* of Thomas Penrose's poem beginning

Faintly brayed the battle's roar,  
Distant down the hollow wind,  
Panting terror fled before,  
Wounds and death were left behind,

shows "how tolerant a true poet like Campbell could be of the most frigid and stilted conventionality of diction." Most certainly he could be so tolerant; but his tolerance here had clearly nothing to do with the style. He was led away, as nearly everybody is, by his sympathy with the matter. Indeed before long Mr Allingham recollects himself, and says, "Battle subjects always took hold on him." They certainly did.

I do not care much for *The Soldier's Dream* as a whole. Most of it is trivial and there is an astonishing disregard of quantity throughout, any three syllables being apparently thought good enough to make an anapæst. Indeed Campbell was at no time very commendable for attention either as a metrist or as a rhymester. In the latter capacity he is often shocking, and in both he



wants the aid of *furor poeticus* to enable him to surmount his difficulties. But the opening stanza of the *Dream* is grand.

WAR SONGS.

Our bugles sang truce, for the night-cloud had lowered,  
And the sentinel stars set their watch in the sky;  
And thousands had sunk on the ground overpowered,  
The weary to sleep and the wounded to die.

Pictorially and poetically both, that is about as good as it can be. *Lochiel's Warning* has no single passage as good: but it is far better as a whole, despite some of the same metrical shortcomings. The immortal "Field of the dead rushing red on the sight," the steed that "fled frantic and far" (and inspired thereby one of the finest passages of another Thomas), the hackneyed but admirable "All plaided and plumed in their tartan array," the "coming events" that a man may admire but hardly now quote—these and other things would save any copy of verses.

But still nothing can touch the immortal Three—*Hohenlinden*, *The Battle of the Baltic*, and *Ye Mariners of England*. What does it matter that no one of them is without a blemish, that *Ye Mariners* is almost a paraphrase of a good old ballad by good old Martin Parker, king of the ballad-mongers of England, that (as a certain kind of critic is never tired of telling us) there is not so much as a vestige of a wild and stormy steep at Elsinore, that to say "sepulchree," as we evidently must in *Hohenlinden*, is trying if not impossible.

Campbell, who is in prose a little old-fashioned perhaps and slightly stilted, but on stilts with the blood in them if I may say so, who gave his reasons for thinking the launch of a line-of-battle ship "one of the sublime objects of artificial life" deserved to write the *Battle of the Baltic*. And he did more, Sempronius, he wrote it. There is not a stanza of it in which you may not pick out something to laugh or to cavil at if you choose. There is not one, at least in its final form, which does not stir the blood to fever-heat. *Ye Mariners of England* is much stronger in the negative sense of freedom from faults, only the last stanza being in any serious degree vulnerable; and the felicity of the rhythm is extraordinary. The famous second and third stanzas, "The spirits of your fathers" and "Britannia needs no bulwarks," are as nearly as possible faultless. Matter and manner could not be better wedded, nor could the whole fire and force of English patriotism be better managed so as to inform and vivify metrical language.

But I am not certain that if I were not an Englishman I should not put *Hohenlinden* highest of the three. It is less important "to us," it appeals less directly to our thought and sentiment, it might have been written by a man of any country,—always provided that his country had such a language to write in. Also it has a few of Campbell's besetting slips. "Scenery" is weak in the second stanza, and I could witness the deletion

of the seventh altogether with some relief and satisfaction. "Sepulchre" is so exceedingly good in itself that the sense that we ought to call it "sepulchree" as aforesaid is additionally annoying (though by the way Glorious John would have called upon us to do the same thing without the slightest hesitation). But the poem is imitated from nothing and so stands above *Ye Mariners*; its blemishes are trifling in comparison with the terrible

WAR SONGS

Then the might of England flushed  
To anticipate the scene.

(where the last line except with much good will to help it is sheer and utter nonsense) and other things in *The Battle of the Baltic*. Moreover the concerted music of its rolling metre is unsurpassed. The triplets of each stanza catch up and carry on the sweep of the fourth line of the preceding in a quite miraculous manner; and that mixed poetic and pictorial touch which has been noted in Campbell appears nowhere so well. Although to me, as to everybody, it has been familiar ever since I was about seven years old, I never can get over my surprise at the effect of so hackneyed a word as "artillery." Indeed I knew a paradoxer once who maintained that this was due to the inspiration which made Campbell prefix "red"; "For," said he, "we are accustomed to see the Artillery in blue."

And it would be improper to leave this subject



of Campbell—almost if not quite our greatest war-singer — without another observation.

WAR SONGS He was not only far below his best self in all other departments of poetry, but he had little taste for it in others. Though he lived till the nineteenth century was nearly half over, though he was junior to all the great men who founded nineteenth century poetry, he was himself only a belated son of the eighteenth century. He was an apprentice of the Popian tradition to the last, and never took out his freedom save in the single department of the war-song.

Nearly a hundred years, more fertile in good poetry and bad verse than any similar period in the history even of England, have passed since in the course of a few months Campbell sketched, if he did not finish, all his three masterpieces. The poetry and the verse both have done their share of battle-writing. Of the great poets who were Campbell's contemporaries and superiors none quite equalled him in this way ; though Scott ran him hard, and Byron, never perhaps writing a war-song of the first merit, abounded in war-poetry of a very high excellence. Scott could do it better than he could do almost anything else in verse ; and if volume and degrees of merit are taken together the prize must be his. Nothing can beat the last canto of *Marmion* as narrative of the kind ; few things can equal the regular lyrics of which *Bonnie Dundee* if not the best is the best known, and the scores of battle-snatches

of which Elspeth Cheyne's version of the battle of Harlaw may rank first. The Lakers were by temperament rather than by <sup>WAR SONGS</sup> principle unfitted for the style: though if Coleridge, in the days of *The Ancient Mariner*, had tried it we should have had some great thing. Shelley, though a very pugnacious person, thought fighting wicked; and Keats, though he demolished the butcher, did not sing of war. Moore is not at his best in such things. In fact they have a knack of being written by poets otherwise quite minor, such as Wolfe of the not undeservedly famous *Burial of Sir John Moore*, a battle-piece surely rather than a mere dirge.

The Epigoni of the great school of 1800—1830 have been on the whole more fruitful than that school itself, though nothing that they have done can quite touch Campbell in fire, and though they have never surpassed Drayton in a sort of buoyant and unforced originality which excludes all idea of the mere literary copy of verses. One of the earliest and certainly one of the best of them in this kind (for Peacock's immortal *War Song of Dinas Vawr* is too openly satirical) was Macaulay. I wish I had space here to destroy once for all (it could easily be done to the satisfaction of any competent tribunal) the silly prejudice against Macaulay's verse which, as a result of an exaggerated following of the late Mr Arnold

by criticasters, is still, among criticasters, common.

WAR SONGS      In Mr Arnold himself I suspect the prejudice to have been partly mere crotchet (for great critic as he was in his day he was full of crotchets), partly perhaps due to some mere personal dislike of the kind which Macaulay very often excited in clever and touchy young men, but partly also and perhaps principally to the facts that Mr Arnold belonged to a generation which affected to look on war as a thing barbarous and outworn, and that he himself had no liking for and was absolutely unskilled in war-verse. *Sohrab and Rustum* is in parts and especially in its famous close a very fine poem indeed ; but of the actual fighting part I can not say much.

Still if Mr Arnold really disliked the *Lays of Ancient Rome* he was quite right to say so ; it is not easy to be equally complimentary to those who affect to dislike them because they think it the right thing to do. Tried by the standard of impartial criticism Macaulay is certainly not a great poet, nor except in this one line a poet at all. Even in this line his greatness is of the second not of the first order, for the simple reason that it is clearly derivative. "No Sir Walter, no *Lays*" is not a critical opinion ; it is a demonstrable fact. Granting so much, I do not see how sane criticism can refuse high, very high, rank to the said *Lays*, and the smaller pieces of



the same kind such as *Ivry* and *Naseby*, and those much less known but admirable verses which tell darkly what happened

WAR SONGS

When the crew with eyes of flame brought the ship without  
a name

Alongside the Last Buccaneer.

For the test of this kind of verse is much simpler and more unerring than that of any other. If in the case of a considerable number of persons of different ages, educations, ranks, and so forth, it induces a desire to walk up and down the room, to shout, to send their fists into somebody else's face, then it is good and there is no more to be said. That it does not cause these sensations in others is no more proof of its badness than it is a proof that a match is bad because it does not light when you rub it on cotton wool.

The still common heresy on this subject has made it necessary to dwell a little thereon. The great mass of Victorian war-poetry it is only possible to pass as it were in review by way rather of showing how much there is and how good than of criticising it in detail. Tennyson was excellent at it. Some otherwise fervent admirers of his are I believe dubious about *The Charge of the Light Brigade*; I have myself no doubt whatever, though it is unequal. Still more unequal are *The Revenge* and *Lucknow*. But the quasi-refrain of the latter

And ever upon the topmost roof our banner of England blew

is surpassed for the special merit of the kind by no  
 WAR SONGS line in the language, though it is run  
 hard by the passage in the former,  
 beginning

And the sun went down and the stars came out far over the  
 summer sea.

There are flashes and sparks of the same fire all  
 over the last Laureate's poems, as in the splendid

Clashed with his fiery few and won

of the Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wel-  
 lington, or the still finer distich

And drunk delight of battle with my peers  
 Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy

and the first stanza of *Sir Galahad* and a score of  
 others. Of Mr Browning's famous Cavalier 'Tunes  
 already mentioned "Give a Rouse" is the only one I  
 care much for; the two others are artificial with  
 anything but Cavalier artificiality. *Hervè Riel* if  
 not quite a war-song (albeit the art of judicious  
 running away is art and part of war) has more of  
 the root of the matter in it, *Through the Metidja*  
 more still (for all its mannerism, it is the only  
 successful attempt I know to give the very sound  
 and rhythm of cymbals in English verse), and  
 perhaps *Prospice*, though only metaphorically a  
 fighting-piece, most of all. For, let it be once  
 more repeated, it is the power of exciting the  
 combative spirit in the reader that makes a war-  
 song.

We shall find this power present abundantly in many poets during these last days. In hardly any department perhaps is Mr <sup>WAR SONGS</sup> Swinburne's too great facility in allowing himself to be mastered by instead of mastering words more to be regretted, for no one has ever excelled him in command both of the rhythms and the language necessary for the style. Even as it is the *Song in Time of Order* hits the perfectly right note in respect of form and spirit. There is plenty of excellent stuff of the sort in Mr William Morris' *Defence of Guinevere*—plenty more in his later work. Charles Kingsley ought to have left us something perfect in the manner, and though he never exactly did, *The Last Buccaneer*, that excellent ballad where

They wrestled up, they wrestled down,  
They wrestled still and sore,

the opening of

Evil sped the battle-play  
On the Pope Calixtus' day,

and the last lines of the *Ode to the North-East Wind* have all the right touch, the touch which has guided us through this review. That touch is to be found again in Sir Francis Doyle's *Return of the Guards*, his *Private of the Buffs*, and most of all in his *Red Thread of Honour*, one of the most lofty, insolent and passionate things concerning this matter that our time has produced.

But here we are reaching dangerous ground, the ground occupied, and sometimes very well



occupied, by younger living writers. It is better to decline this and close the survey. It has shown us some excellent, and even super-excellent things, some of surpassing and gigantic badness, a very great deal that is good and very good. I do not think any other language can show anything at all approaching it. Despite the excellence of old French in this kind, and despite the abundant military triumphs of the modern nation, the modern language of France has given next to nothing of merit in it. The *Marseillaise* itself, really remarkable for the way in which it marries itself to a magnificent tune is, when divorced from that tune, chiefly rubbish. The Germans,—with one imperishable thing, Körner's *Schwertlied* (sometimes sneered at by the same class of persons who sneer at Macaulay) in the pure style, and a few others, such as Heine's *Die Grenadiere* in the precincts of it—have little that is very remarkable.

In these and other European languages, so far as I know, you often get war-pictures rendered in verse not ill, but seldom the war-spirit rendered thoroughly in song or snatch. Certain unpleasant ones will tell us that as the fighting power dies down, so the power of singing increases, that "poets succeed better in fiction than in fact," as Mr Waller, both speaker and hearer being persons of humour, observed to his Majesty Charles II. on a celebrated occasion. Luckily, however, that *Ballad to the Brave Cambro-Britons*

and their Harp, and *The Battle of the Baltic* will settle this suggestion. It will hardly be contended that the countrymen and con-<sup>WAR SONGS</sup>temporaries of Drayton, that the contemporaries and countrymen of Campbell, had lost the trick of fighting. Look too at Le Brun *Pindare* and his poem on the *Vengeur*, a very few years earlier than *The Battle of the Baltic* itself. Le Brun belonged to very much the same school of poetry as the author of *The Pleasures of Hope*, and I do not know that on the whole he was a very much worse poet. The fictitious story of the *Vengeur*, on which he wrote, and which he not at all improbably believed (as most Frenchmen do to this day) was even fresher than Copenhagen to Campbell, and far more exciting. Yet scarcely even those woful contemporaries of Corporal John, from whom I have unfilially drawn the veil, made a more hopeless mess of it than Le Brun. The spirit of all poetry blows where it listeth, but the spirit of none more than of the poetry of war. Let us hold up our hands and be thankful that it has seen fit to blow to us in England such things as *Agincourt*, as *Scots Wha Hae*, as *Ye Mariners of England*, and a hundred others not so far inferior to them. \*

\* See Appendix B "Songs of the Crimean War."

## VII.

### MADAME D'ARBLAY.

THERE are so many things that are interesting in the life and works of Fanny Burney, that  
MME. D'ARBLAY. it is difficult for any one to know "where to begin." Perhaps some smart person may rejoin that it is not necessary to begin at all, inasmuch as one of the acknowledged masters of what the French call "bio-bibliographical" writing made her the subject of a famous essay half a century ago. But, without presumption, this judgment may be disabled. In the first place it is the peculiarity,—some may say the weakness—of critical writing that, though it may contain final things, it never can be as a whole final. Each generation takes its own view, never to be anticipated, and with great difficulty, in the absence of actual documents, to be recovered, as to the interesting books and persons of the past. Each deserves that this view should be put on record: none can claim that the record shall be closed.

And, again, though Macaulay seldom wrote a



more interesting essay than that on Madame D'Arblay, and though it would be exceedingly rash for anyone to enter into competition with him in some points, there are others, in which he is exposed not merely to his well-known besetting sins, but to some special and peculiar objections. It was absurd and almost ignoble of him to call Croker a "bad writer." It was absurd, for Croker was not a bad writer, though he was an ill-conditioned person who had wreaked a very discreditable revenge on an old lady of a great past, an unblemished character, and a very amiable disposition, for her exceedingly pardonable refusal to put her knowledge of Johnson at his disposal. It was ignoble because, as instructed people then knew, and as everybody knows now, Croker's fault was the fault not of being a bad writer, but of being a good speaker, and having tripped up T. B. Macaulay in the Reform Bill debates more than once. Again, Macaulay's anxiety to vindicate the leaders of the Whig party for their persecution of Hastings is unduly prominent, all the more so because Hastings certainly was not supported in any particularly decided way by the leaders of the Tory party. And for a third complaint Macaulay, though he did not originate the exaggeration, exaggerates Miss Burney's sufferings as a *dame d'Atours*: while he is rather perfunctory and incomplete in his survey of her literary work. To some extent indeed he could not help this, for

the old issue of the *Diary* was not carried to an end

MME. when he wrote, and the very delightful  
D'ARBLAY. *Early Diary* was not published till some thirty years after his death. As usual, when the critic is a great one, these supplements of information have not in the least superannuated his work. As usual also they have justified an attempt, with however inferior powers, to supplement that work itself.

Besides, Macaulay, writing with good will, and "fighting a prize" against a rather ungenerous assailant, has not wholly grappled with the literary peculiarities of the problem, though he has admitted with fair confession, but also with a little avoidance, the astounding declension of Madame D'Arblay's literary talent. Her whole work has never yet, I think, been surveyed. The readers and the critics of the later novels and the *Memoirs of Dr Burney* were not acquainted with the charms of the *Diary*. The devotees of the *Diary* have very naturally said little or nothing—in some cases I believe they have known little or nothing—of anything but *Evelina* and *Cecilia*. In fact, while the *Memoirs* are not a very common book, *Camilla* and *The Wanderer* are now (in any decent condition) very uncommon ones. They were originally printed in large numbers, but they were never reprinted. The copies were worn steadily to death in circulating libraries; and the result is, that with the help of the recent mania among book-collectors for first editions of novels, good

copies of both, especially of *The Wanderer*, fetch ridiculous prices. Indeed you may pay a fair number of shillings for copies, which a finical person will find it necessary to read in gloves, of books which possess in the case of *Camilla* little more than a remnant, and in the case of *The Wanderer* not so much as a remnant, of genius or even of talent.

It so happens that, as a result of the order of publication, though not of the dates of writing, Miss Burney's work falls into three natural and excellent sections for criticism. There are first the novels; then the *Memoirs of Dr Burney*; and lastly, the Diary and Letters early and late, though here the early comes after the late by the accident of posthumous publication. The novels pursue a steady sinking down from excellent to atrocious (for I cannot agree with some that *Cecilia* exceeds *Evelina* in anything but bulk); the Memoirs drop to a lower depth still; and then the Diaries rise to perhaps a higher height than that at which the novels began. It is unfortunate, doubtless, that the best work should be in fact all contemporaneous and all early. But it is fair to say that even in the latest written passages of the *Diary and Letters*, happy touches meet us which may be looked for absolutely in vain in the much earlier *Wanderer* and *Memoirs of Dr Burney*.

Madame D'Arblay is so inimitable a historian of her own life, it has been so well dealt with by Macaulay, and it is in its general outline so com-



monly known that there is no great need to dwell at any very great length on it

MME. D'ARBLAY. here, though certain points may require notice. She was born at Lynn on the 13th of June 1752—a fact for the discovery of which Croker took unnecessary trouble, and for the revelation of which he received, as was meet, unnecessary abuse. There is not the slightest evidence that Fanny ever endeavoured to conceal her age: though the admitted childishness of her appearance made people think her younger than she was. And so far from her having ever attempted to represent *Evelina* as the work of a “girl of seventeen,” we have her own distinct statement, which none but a fool could misunderstand, and none but a churl affect to misunderstand, that her heroine is the “girl of seventeen” and that she, the novelist, is “past” that interesting age. Her father was the Historian of Music, latterly Organist to Chelsea Hospital, and the friend of the best men of his time. One of her brothers was an officer of Cook’s, and later as “Admiral” Burney the friend of Southey, Coleridge, and especially Lamb; another was a scholar justly renowned for Greek in the day of Porson. Her sisters were all clever, and one of them was herself a novelist. There are references in the Diary proper, and full ones in the Early Diary, to Fanny’s backwardness, shyness, and so forth as a girl and young woman. But she was always scribbling; she was in a singularly stimulating society, and she published *Evelina* in

a clandestine sort of way (1778), not indeed at "seventeen," but at not quite twenty-six. Then she became a lioness, and remained so; *Cecilia* (1782) bringing her more fame, and (which *Evelina* had not done), some money.\* Later still came the famous incident of her becoming assistant Keeper of the Robes to Queen Charlotte (1786) in which employment she abode five years, pined, and grew positively ill.

A great deal of nonsense has been, in my humble judgment, written about this episode. Macaulay, no lover of kings, especially Tory ones, very handsomely acquits George the Third; but he is remorselessly severe on Queen Charlotte. Others have involved the royal family generally in condemnation; and almost everybody, from Macaulay himself downwards, has lamented the loss of immortal works during the period, and put down the subsequent drying up of Miss Burney's genius to its evil effect. Let us (in the greatest words, never to be hackneyed however often quoted, of her greatest friend) "clear our minds of cant." The offer of the appointment was, no doubt, a mistake of good nature, and its acceptance was one of bad judgment. Indeed, it seems to me that Dr Burney, to please whom Fanny accepted it against her wish, has never had his due measure of blame. Despite his amiability he seems always to have

\* Macaulay had heard this money put at £2000, which is large; a letter printed later by Mrs Ellis from Charlotte Burney reduces it to £250, which seems unbelievably small.

been rather a silly man, as indeed is not obscurely hinted in the oxymel of Mrs Thrales' MME. D'ARBLAY. verses on him, and as is established by the fact of his not only writing a poem on astronomy and pestering Herschel about it, but habitually keeping a doggrel diary after a fashion common in his day, and pardonable enough to schoolboys and undergraduates, but not so pardonable in elderly professional men. On this occasion, too, he was, I fear, not merely silly, but selfish. It was the dream of his life—a dream already once or twice disappointed—to be “Master of the King’s Band ;” and he evidently thought that if his daughter were close about the Royal person, he would secure this coveted post. It is satisfactory that he did not.

As to the Queen—for the King, as we have seen, is acquitted by a hostile judge—there are not so many excuses required for her as seems to be generally thought, and there are many more available than are required. It is equally history and human nature that royal personages, whether their royalty be political or metaphorical, should be apt to think that the honour of serving them is far more than sufficient recompense for the pains of it. But this need not be counted. Queen Charlotte had been accustomed to the slavish submission paid to German Transparencies and Serenities much humbler in rank than an English Queen. She knew perfectly well that hundreds of ladies in Germany and France, and dozens in England, would have gone on their knees for the place.



She had the want of understanding of physical weakness, which is far too common in MME. physically strong people, be they queens D'ARBLAY. or not. Part of Miss Burney's sufferings was due to their Majesties' natural attachment to Mrs Schwellenberg, who, old cat as she was,\* was intensely faithful; and part to her own failure to assert herself and the equality which it would seem she titularly held. The restrictions of visitors and so forth, which are so bitterly complained of in the Diary, were almost unavoidable in a household which tried above all things to avoid the licence of the two previous reigns and of the Prince of Wales's establishment. The parsimony was not shown to Miss Burney only.

But the important question for posterity is whether this residence at Court really did as it is pretended, "dry her vein" of novel writing, and this will be best treated later; it is enough to say for the present that facts and probabilities are equally against it.

When she was released (1791),† the interesting

\* Much may be forgiven to "Peter Pindar," for the way in which, chiefly by anticipation and certainly in ignorance, he avenged Fanny of "Cerbera" in some of the bitterest and most amusing of his satires.

† The recently published *Memoirs* of Mrs Pappendick, who some time after Fanny's day occupied the inferior position of "Wardrobe Woman," assert that it was a case of dismissal rather than of resignation, and that the Queen was displeased at Miss Burney's being always writing when her bell rang. Mrs Ellis has had no difficulty in pointing out that this is irreconcilable, not only with Fanny's own account, but with certain facts. It is,

part of her life to others was practically over,

MME. though the most interesting part of it  
D'ARBLAY. to herself was yet to begin. In the society of her friends, the Lockes of Norbury Park, she met an elderly and respectable *émigré*, the Chevalier D'Arblay, who had no money, and whose attractions generally were not very clear except to the eyes of love. They married (1793)—one suspects M. D'Arblay to have been a rather poor though probably no unamiable kind of creature—on nothing but the little pension which the Queen had given Frances when she left Court; and the Chevalier took to gardening and “invested the apartments with imperceptible cupboards,” as his wife says in the unbelievable English of her later times. A baby—Alexander, who afterwards went to Cambridge, was heard of by Macaulay, his six years junior, as a rather remarkable mathematician, took orders in the Church of England, and died three years before his mother in 1837—was born in 1794. Then Madame D'Arblay wrote *Camilla*, which was published in the first place by subscription with great success, and brought her in some three thousand pounds, but kept no hold on the public. When Napoleon's power was established, M. D'Arblay returned to France and obtained a civil post; but towards the end of the Tyranny his

however, likely enough to have been a back-stairs tradition founded upon, or fostered by, some ill-tempered remark of the Schwellenbergs.

wife and child took the opportunity to escape to England. He had better luck under <sup>MME.</sup> the Restoration than under the Empire, <sup>D'ARBLAY.</sup> but did not stay long in France, and returning to England, died at Bath in 1818. Meanwhile his wife had brought out the terrible failure of *The Wanderer* (which, however, was widely sold before people found out how bad it was), and in the same year (1814) lost her father. Not much is recorded of her later years by others, except a visit from Sir Walter Scott. She died aged eighty-eight on the sixth of January 1840, having brought out the unlucky *Memoirs* of her father in 1832, her eightieth year.

*Evelina* delectable; *Cecilia* admirable; *Camilla* estimable; *The Wanderer* impossible; *The Memoirs of Dr Burney* inconceivable; the *Diary* and *Letters*, whether original or "early," unequal, but at their best seldom equalled;—this might serve in the snip-snap and flashy way for a short criticism of Madame D'Arblay's work. But that work is not either in its merits or its defects to be polished off so unceremoniously.

The special merits of *Evelina* and their source may be found indicated with remarkable felicity though with no intended application to Miss Burney in a very unlikely place, the opening of *Ernest Maltravers*, or rather in the preface of 1840, which the author prefixed thereto. Speaking of *Pelham*, Lord Lytton (or, as it is more natural to call him in connection with these early works,



Bulwer) says that "it has the faults and perhaps  
MMR. the merits natural to a very early age,  
D'ARBLAY. when the novelty of life itself quickens  
the apprehension, when we see distinctly and represent vividly what lies on the surface of the world, and when, half sympathising with the follies we satirise, there is a gusto in our paintings which atones for their exaggeration. As we grow older we observe less, we reflect more : and like Frankenstein we dissect in order to create." We shall find, I think, that this passage—one of many that show in the author a critical faculty with which he is too seldom credited, and which he certainly did not bestow on his own work so often as he might—supplies a tolerably complete key to Madame D'Arblay's weakness as well as to her strength : and indeed (certain things being added) explains the amazing inequality of her work. But for the present we are only concerned with the positive side of it, and the application is certainly very complete. For all the ungraciousness of the Crokerian chronology, *Evelina* was written virtually at a very early age : for Fanny Burney was admittedly a very backward child, with a haphazard and irregular education which made her less accomplished in the ordinary sense at six and twenty than more regularly trained misses at sixteen. She began, moreover, to scribble very early in actual years ; and though most of these early attempts perished in the flames, we know that *Evelina* was connected with one of them,

and it would be contrary to all literary experience if part of it was not written as <sup>MMI</sup> early as they were. At any rate, nothing <sup>D'ARBLAY.</sup> can depict more exactly and appropriately than these words of Bulwer's the special merits of the book—the quick observation, the distinct sight, the vivid presentation of surface things, and finally the “gusto”—obsolete but excellent word, which perhaps has dropped out of use because the thing to which it applies has dropped out of experience. “Gusto” was the reigning attribute—*engouement* they called it in France—characteristic of the eighteenth century: it has steadily declined in the nineteenth.

What admirable subjects of experience Fanny had, the diaries sixty and a hundred years later have amply told the world: and Macaulay has summed them up in one of his famous and favourite show passages. It is still not easily intelligible why Dr Burney, with all his amiability and talent, all the fancy of the time from the king downwards for music, and all the advantage that his association with the charmed circle of Johnson and Burke and Reynolds gave him, should with his extremely modest position (he was neither more nor less than a music master), his scanty fortune, and his poky house in St Martin's Street, have become such a pet of society. But he certainly was a pet of it, and his daughter had the *entrée* to the very best as well as the bluest of London sets, even before she made herself a new key to

them by her work. In that work, too, we may note  
MME. that half sympathy of which Bulwer also  
D'ARBLAY. speaks. Miss Burney is a satirist to  
some extent or she could not be so amusing as she  
is: but it is very small and very good-natured satire.  
If we compare her with her famous sisters or rather  
nieces in the next generation we shall find nothing  
in her of the inexorable justice which has been  
called cruelty in Miss Austen, of the severity,  
which sometimes comes near to savagery, of Miss  
Ferrier. She is even more lenient to her puppets  
than Miss Edgeworth herself, though she may  
seem to this generation too tolerant of some  
things in that rougher society both as she repre-  
sents them in fiction, and as she records them in  
her actual experience.\*

There is avowedly very little art in the book,  
and its characters, like its composition, remind  
us of the so-called humour-comedy of the time  
between Jonson and Wycherley, the principles  
of which had frequently been adopted by novel  
writers, even such great ones as Smollett. Sporadic  
eccentricities, accumulated more or less anyhow,  
form a catalogue which does as a matter of fact  
carry the reader from beginning to end of the  
story, but which exhibits hardly the slightest  
trace of regular plan. The "anagnorisis" of  
Evelina at the end is one of the very weakest of

\* Cf. particularly the atrocious conduct of the Packingtons at  
Westwood to poor "Lilies and Roses."—Miss W.—in the Early  
Diary.



such things (which are rather apt to be weak), and the only excuse for Mr Villars and MME. Mrs Selwyn in not having long before D'ARBLAY. softened that "reed painted like iron," Sir John Belmont, is to be found in the fact that Mr Villars throughout his letters shows himself chiefly a fool, and that Mrs Selwyn is represented as chiefly a shrew. Evelina herself pants with propriety, and blushes becomingly : and Lord Orville is not more of a stick than most of his kind. But the outrageous practical jokes of Captain Mirvan on the hapless old harridan Duval and her more hapless because more respectable French friend are overdone, and have no sort of connection with the story, while Sir Clement Willoughby's wildness is shockingly tame. Yet all these faults are far more than atoned for by the youthful zest and freshness of the general picture, by the liveliness with which the incidents, desultory as they are, pick up and succeed each other, and above all, by the incomparable sketches of the Branghtons and Mr Smith. In Poland Street, where the Burneys had lived before moving to Queen's Square, and then to Sir Isaac Newton's house just south of Leicester Square, they seem to have associated with a rather lower class of neighbours than later, and Frances used her models royally. It cannot be said that she is not at home with the upper classes : she not only knew but could draw gentlemen and ladies. Her keen as well as kind Daddy Crisp was perfectly right in ejaculating in

reference to some epistolary "conversation-piece"

MME. of hers: "If specimens of this kind had  
D'ARBLAY. been preserved of the different *Tons* that have succeeded each other for twenty centuries last past, how interesting they would have been." But Fanny was more than a mere *Ton*-painter, her best characters are more than gentlemen and ladies: they are immortals, as perhaps no others of hers are, with the doubtful exception of Sir Sedley Clarendel, the chief spot of brightness in the respectable blank of *Camilla*.

With all my sense of its defects, I never read *Evelina* (and I have read it two or three times at least during the last decade or so, as well as often earlier) without delight. Of *Cecilia* I can only borrow the famous libel on marriage, and say that to me at least "it is good, but it is not delightful." One feels immediately the presence of a much more elaborate effort, of a much maturer art, than can be found in *Evelina*. Burneians have always differed as to the tradition that Johnson gave direct assistance. It is a matter purely of tradition and of internal evidence, and Johnson himself appears to have said (which does not settle the matter) that he had never seen it till it was printed. But it is fair to remember that Macaulay, who was not only a good critic but had access to stores of oral information long since closed, was in favour of it; and I own that I agree with Macaulay. However, even if we leave this open, it is impossible not to note the

difference certain to exist, and existing, between a book written absolutely without skilled MME.  
censors and published anyhow, and one D'ARBLAY.  
deliberately composed under the eyes of two skilled scholars such as Dr Burney and Daddy Crisp: with a floating atmosphere, leaving Johnson out, of literary friends from Burkes and Windhams down to Murphys and Malones. It is not, I think, known who suggested the extension of scale to the enormous limits, or nearly so, which Richardson had induced readers to tolerate if not to expect. Perhaps it was the booksellers—which seems all the more likely as Miss Burney always clung to the five volumes afterwards. For myself I own that, after the second volume or thereabouts, I find *Cecilia* rather difficult to read. The introduction of the girl to town has much of the liveliness of *Evelina*: it was a theme evidently congenial: and though many of the details are exaggerated, especially the cockneyisms of Mr Briggs (the Branghtons, alas! are already far away), though the machinations and melodrama of the Harrels might be toned down with great advantage both to probability and pleasure, the whole is well grouped and well machined. *Cecilia*, moreover, has the advantage of her elder sister in character and sense. But after the point named the interest seems to me to die away and to be revived chiefly by Lady Honoria who, though she owes a good deal to Anna Howe and Charlotte Grandison, has the advantage over them of being



a lady in fact as well as in name. All the  
MME. Delviles are naught ; Mr Monckton  
D'ARBLAY. and Mr Albany, bad and good lay  
figures ; while Miss Larolles, popular as she was  
with her own generation, does not possess very  
vital signs now. In other words, Miss Burney  
wrote *Evelina* because she had a mind to do so :  
she wrote *Cecilia* because she made up her mind  
to do so.

The signs of the collar are to me so evident in  
this book that I am wholly unable to accept the  
view of those who think that, had she been left  
unmolested by kings and queens, we should have  
had more *Evelinas* or even more *Cecilias* from her.  
In the first place there are in the Diary certain  
distinct avowals, which I see no reason for assign-  
ing to mere bashfulness or mock humility, that  
she felt herself written out. There is at least one  
almost explicit hint from the experienced and  
affectionate Crisp that he thought she might be.  
And most important of all, there are the books  
themselves—those which come before and those  
which follow. Let us pay a little attention to  
these latter before coming to the general question.

I can see no reason, apart from a freezing of  
the genial current, why *Camilla* should not have  
been at least as good a book as *Cecilia*. To  
listen to some of those who pity Miss Burney, one  
would imagine that five years of rather harass-  
ing and uncongenial employment in the very noon  
of strength will ruin health and sterilise intellect

for the rest of life. As a matter of fact, Miss Burney had had another five years of <sup>MME.</sup> entire rest, the first two spent in her <sup>D'ARBLAY.</sup> usual society and in pleasant travel, the last in retired but extremely happy married life with hospitable and accomplished neighbours. Her former range of experience had been enriched by her Court stage, which, confined as it was in some ways, could not fail to give her new types. It is said that she was hampered by the desire of writing nothing that could offend the Queen. Now this is surely rather childish. It would seem as if some admirers of Fanny Burney had got Charlotte of Mecklenburg on the brain. And they do not seem to consider that they are paying a very bad compliment to their own idol when they suggest that she was not only a hopelessly submissive courtier, but was destitute of versatility in her own art—that she could not write a good novel under certain not very difficult conditions of pleasing, which, I must add, I do not myself think were in the least incumbent on her. That *Camilla* is not a great novel I am afraid cannot be denied. It is one of its glories that Miss Austen was among the original subscribers, and the extreme Burneians have tried to extract a testimonial from this great pupil. This will not do. *Camilla* is indeed joined with *Cecilia* and *Belinda* in *Northanger Abbey* to receive one of those generous exaltings of contemporary work in its own craft in which young genius, as opposed to

young cubbishness, often indulges. But it is de-

plorably noticeable that though the more  
MME. elaborate depreciation of the book which  
D'ARBLAY. follows is put in the mouth of John Thorpe, whose  
opinions the author certainly did not mean to en-  
dorse, no distinct vindication of it is attempted, and  
the illiberal sneer at "the woman who married an  
emigrant" is the only criticism which is distinctly  
held up to ridicule. The fact is that, as I must  
repeat, *Camilla* is *not* a great novel. The char-  
acter of the absent and pedantic Dr Orkborne  
pleased good wits at the time—he is mentioned  
in *The Antiquary*, and it is almost the only  
allusion of Scott's that, to my shame, I must  
acknowledge not to have understood till a very  
recent period. *Camilla* herself is really a very  
nice girl, though one wishes for a more human  
revolt in her now and then. Sir Sedley Clarendel,  
the most complete of fops, has been praised before,  
and may be praised again: Mrs Arlbery is almost  
certainly Mrs Thrale, adapted with judgment and  
good taste, and there are other separate sketches  
which remind us that we are reading a book by  
the author of *Evelina*. But Sir Hugh Tyrold,  
who alters his will at every moment, not out of  
caprice, but out of sheer silliness, who maintains,  
teases, and fears the pedant Dr Orkborne, and  
who generally behaves like a senile baby, justifies  
John Thorpe's criticism to such an extent, that  
I have sometimes been really afraid that the  
*griffe de la lionne* appears in Miss Austen's own



reference to the matter. The wicked governess, Miss Margland, is the most uninteresting of unamiable duennas; no undergraduate, who was not an utter fool as well as an infernal rascal, ever consented as Lionel Tyrold does to blackmail his invalid uncle by anonymous letters; Mr Tyrold, Camilla's father, a learned, intelligent, and virtuous divine, ought to be whipped for the way in which he treats his family, and allows them to be treated. The hero, Edgar Mandlebert, who vacillates between Camilla and her beautiful fool and vixen of a cousin Indiana (the name is interesting when we think of George Sand), and who is held up as a pattern at once of chivalry and brains, might have a set of halberts rigged up next to Mr Tyrold's with great advantage.

The fact is that the whole thing, except a few separate traits, is in the vague. The author has indeed still got a plot, as she had in *Cecilia*, which is more than she had in *Evelina*. She has got some good studies for the filling in: but she does not in the least know what to do with them, and she has no grasp of life as a whole. She is constantly "off the rails;" indeed it is exceedingly rare that she is on them.

In *The Wanderer* it is not too much to say that she never gets on them at all. The opening scene of this unluckiest of books, a book which was expected, hailed, welcomed by everybody, from veterans to novices, and which sank as soon as it appeared, has a faint touch of the personal

experience which was always necessary to Fanny, and which she sometimes utilised so well, in the flight of the heroine by boat from France. Madame D'Arblay had just had something very like that experience. But the rest is all stark nought. The fatal long-lost or misknown daughter business invited her once more, as in *Evelina*; and she could no more, as in *Evelina*, redeem it with humours and with the fresh insight of an unjaded eye. The progress of "the Wanderer," *alias* "the penetrated Juliet" from her sufferings in the boat, and from the vulgar persecutions of Mrs Ireton till the time when, united with Mr Harleigh, she is "embraced and owned by her honoured benefactress, the Marchioness," is a kind of nightmare of dulness. The hardened reviewer, "famousèd for fight" with thousands of novels, but just saves his credit as he struggles through this fearful book, where nobody is alive, and where the adventures of the gibbering ghosts who figure in it are gibbered in a language such as hardly our own day—a nurse of monsters in style—has seen. The victims of Charlottophobia say that Miss Burney's sojourn at Court among half-Germans, and her subsequent sojourn in France, account for the frightful lingo which defaces *The Wanderer* and *The Memoirs of Dr Burney*. They forget again that only a weak plant could be stifled by such atmospheres. Macaulay set it down to Johnsonese unintelligently exaggerated, and there is something in this. But

whatever the cause, the effect is not disputable, and it may be said, without remorse MME. and without caricature, that nothing D'ARBLAY. but the matter of *The Wanderer* could deserve such a style, and that the style of *The Wanderer* is, on the whole, almost too bad for the matter.

With the *Memoirs* things are, if possible, worse still in point of form, and the matter, though very much better, is almost hopelessly disfigured. Unfortunately the documents on which it is founded were mainly destroyed. Mrs Ellis, Madame D'Arblay's most faithful and most generous defender, laments the fatal misuse of these materials. They were, we know, abundant, superabundant; and Dr Burney had had opportunities such as few men have had. The actual book is a tedious rhapsody, exceedingly hard to read with any intelligent comprehension of dates and surroundings, barren in matter while full of the very worst art. Macaulay, doing his *devoir* gallantly, tried to maintain that, though there was deplorably bad writing, there was no "dotage." I cannot be sure of this. It is not merely that the style, as Macaulay himself fully admits, and shows by extract, is horrible and heartrending, not merely that not a few passages and themes which we have delightfully treated in the Diary are here re-presented "not in dog's likeness," as Mr Carlyle used to say. It would be cruel to multiply the specimens which Macaulay has already given of the hopeless *galimatias* which distinguishes the



book. But one instance of something worse may be given. Madame D'Arblay quotes MME. D'ARBLAY. an anecdote of Bonaparte, who complained that her husband had written him "a devil of a letter," and added pleasantly, "However, I ought only to regard in it the husband of Cecilia." One only wishes that all the anecdotes of the Corsican presented him in so pleasant a light as this. But will it be believed that Madame D'Arblay herself, the "little character-monger" of Johnson, the Fannikin of Crisp, the not too azure blue who had held her own at Streatham and in London, adds, "Of the author of *Cecilia* of course he meant." She was eighty at the time, no doubt, she had lost father, husband, friends; but what a gap is here between the creator of the Branghtons and the commentator of a kindly and fairly *spirituel* confusion which is as common as any figure of speech! To quote much from that unhappy book would be unworthy of "decent gentility and education" (as Mark Pattison has it), for in more than language it *is* the "dotage," the clear dotage of a woman of delightful talent, and in some ways of true genius. It cannot be defended; to criticise it seriously were idle; and to laugh at it inhuman and base.

And so we come to the *Diary*, no part of which was issued during its author's lifetime, though it formed the basis of much of the *Memoirs of Dr Burney*, and therefore exhibits, in a way even more curious than melancholy, the fashion in

which it is possible for a painter to paint his own good work into bad. This Diary, even MME. yet, is understood not to be published D'ARBLAY. completely, and probably never will be; but enough is extant to make it one of the bulkiest things of the kind. Nor is this surprising when it is remembered that the letter and diary-writing habits of eighteenth century young ladies are by no means caricatured in the works of Richardson, which, in their turn, helped to recommend and prolong the practice. Until her marriage, and to some extent after it, Fanny appears to have been incessantly scribbling—for her father often, for herself almost as often; while almost the whole of her Court life is recorded in a sort of letter-journal to “Susan and Fredy,” *i.e.*, her sister Susanna, the wife of the Colonel Phillip who was afterwards Charles Lamb’s friend, and Frederica Locke of Norbury. In later years she cut these diaries about very considerably;—she had always, as in the famous instance of the early holocaust of her MSS., at the direct or indirect instance of her stepmother, that comparative readiness to part with the fruits of her labours which usually, though not invariably, accompanies extremely easy and rapid production. But she left much, and much of that much would seem to be still extant.

Delightful as the *Diary* is, its extreme voluminousness, and the singular inequality which here as elsewhere shows itself in the author’s work, have brought upon it some rather harsh judgments, such

as that it is "tiresome." I do not myself find it tiresome anywhere — even in the MME. D'ARBLAY. interminable conversations with "Mr Turbulent" and "Mr Fairly," even in the bewildering multitude of small details in the *Early Diary* which Mrs Ellis, with a patience and skill which no editor could surpass, has devoted herself to explaining, adjusting and unravelling; hardly even, though I confess that the "hardly" sometimes needs to be accentuated, in the sketches of the later years when little happened, when Madame D'Arblay either was excluded from inspiriting society or left no account of that which she did see, and when the curse of jargon, though never so evident in the Diary as in the published books, had laid its grasp upon her. It will not, indeed, do to expect too much or the wrong sort of things; we must not look for perpetual epigram or for frequent good stories; we must carry about with us continually the remembrance that we are in the century of Richardson and of Horace Walpole, and that Miss Burney, with all her gifts, had not those of either, while she had the voluminousness of both. We must remember yet again Diderot's quaint excuse for his beloved English novelist that, after all, the actual conversations in *Grandison*, etc., would, if you took part in them, take longer than the record of them does in reading.

And in large parts of the book there is no need for any remembrance, any allowance at all. The brilliancy and charm of the Streatham parts of the



Diary, of the best of the Court scenes, of the Hastings trial, have been acknowledged MME. by all good judges ever since they first D'ARBLAY. appeared. Macaulay in one of his most masterly exercises of joint literary divination and interpretation, constructed, out of the fragmentary and pompous notices in the *Memoirs*, a glowing picture of the *salon*, such a little one and so well attended, in St Martin's Street; but the actual documents of the *Early Diary* bring out the details of this with unexpected and seldom failing piquancy. The want of these indications made him perhaps a little wrong on "Daddy" Crisp and the Chesington circle; but the fuller descriptions of that odd person, and his odd household, are all the more welcome. Some hold that books of this sort ought never to be read straight through; I have read both the diaries in that fashion more than once, and with great pleasure. But for dipping they certainly have few superiors; nor have they very many equals even in that century of autobiography.

To what, then, are we to attribute the admitted inequalities of the *Diary* and the steady declension of power in the *Novels*? All sorts of causes, some already noted, have been assigned, besides that absurd one of Miss Burney's powers having been killed by five years' waiting at odd times to hand the queen's clothes to the wardrobe women, and fighting with Schwellenbergs at Windsor, very considerably tempered by flirtations with equerries, &c. The influence and the withdrawal of the

influence of Johnson; the bad English spoken  
MME. by that devoted household of George  
D'ARBLAY. the Third; the worse or none at all  
heard for so many years in France; ill health,  
narrow means, and divers other things have been  
alleged. There is perhaps no region in which  
the excellent French phrase about those who  
"seek noon at fourteen o'clock" is so constantly  
illustrated as in that of criticism. For, let us con-  
sider what Fanny Burney's special talents are;  
what they were considered to be by those who  
know her best; and what she thought of them  
herself. Perhaps the last may be ruled out as  
treacherous, but I do not think so. Vanity is  
common enough, and there are plenty of us who  
think that with choice and chance we could do  
great things. But persistent self-delusion about  
literary powers is, I believe, except in the case of  
poets, exceedingly rare, and Fanny was not a poet.  
Moreover, self-delusion, which takes the form of  
self-depreciation, is so rare both in poets and others,  
as to be very nearly unknown. And we know  
that Fanny at no time thought highly of her own  
talents, that she had pretty distinctly proposed to  
herself not to attempt anything after *Cecilia*, and  
that everything she did do afterwards, with a view  
to publication, was planned more or less under the  
pressure of necessity on the one hand and large  
offers on the other. The necessity of writing—the  
imperative impulse of which we sometimes hear—  
may be very rare. But the impulse not to write

when it does not come from constitutional laziness (and Miss Burney was the most industrious of women) is very seldom a <sup>MME.</sup> D'ARBLAY. trick, very generally a kindly warning of nature.

Of what her friends thought we have fortunately one document which is worth a thousand. The researches of Mrs Ellis have shown that Macaulay's estimate of the chagrin of Daddy Crisp at the comparative failure of a play which might, with quite equal truth, have been said to have comparatively succeeded, was mistaken, though quite reasonably mistaken. It is impossible to argue (and Macaulay had far too much sense even to hint the argument) that Crisp, years after the incident, in a different line altogether, and in reference to a person for whom he had admittedly the fondest affection, was in the very least degree likely to be jealous of Fanny. Yet not in reference to *Evelina*, of which the sudden and so to speak accidental success might have encouraged a Job's comforter to try to "rub the guilt off," but in reference to *Cecilia*, which had been carefully engineered, had taken and kept the top of the tide, and really deserved very high praise, we find from this experienced, and if anything partial monitor, a strangely serious and, in the light of subsequent events, more strangely prophetic warning. It is not to be summarised in any single passage, but anybody who considers the published letters to and from Crisp during the progress of the book will see, I think, that he was profoundly sceptical of Fanny keeping



up her vein and not too well satisfied even with  
MME. this famous and admired production  
D'ARBLAY. of it. He tells her, indeed, that there  
had been nothing so good since Fielding and  
Smollett, and he was right. Smollett had died  
seven years before the publication of *Evelina*,  
and for a good thirty years there was nothing  
published, there was nothing even written (except  
certain early works of the young lady who sub-  
scribed to *Camilla* and defended it at once), which  
could even touch *Evelina* and *Cecilia* in merit.  
But the author of certain remarks about Voltaire  
and Shakespeare which may be found in the *Diary*  
was not likely to go wrong on the negative side  
any more than on the positive ; and he must have  
noted the seeds of decay in his "Fannikin," as  
keenly as he noted the flowers of flourishing.

The fact, as it seems to me, is, that Fanny Burney  
is in English literature our capital example of a  
kind of writer commoner in the old conditions of  
English life abroad than at home, and commoner  
in all countries among women than among men.  
In this class a talent of observation and presenta-  
tion, real and charming to no small degree, is  
forced at a certain time, and by favourable circum-  
stances, into not premature but perfect bloom. Its  
best members always remain happy and favour-  
able subjects in point of receptivity ; but they have,  
as a rule, no absolute root or spring of creative  
genius ; and they do not assist the native want  
by any thorough study of good models. Many

critics of Fanny Burney have expressed an amiable but not wholly intelligent surprise, at the very small amount that she seems to have read — brought up among unguarded books as she was—and at the somewhat limited intelligence which her critical remarks show. The fact is that she was the very reverse of bookish, and the innocent raptures over certain love letters (the work of that clever bookmaker, William Combe) in which she and her Mr Fairly indulged at Cheltenham, the comparison which in an Early Diary she makes between the *Vicar of Wakefield*, and some stuff of which I should have to go to the book even to remember the name, show what power of literary discrimination she had. Nor was her really creative instinct strong — *Evelina* is a chaos, though a delightful one, as far as plot or construction goes; if *Cecilia* is better we know that, putting Johnson out of question and admitting his denial of having seen the book before it was in print to the fullest, it was subjected to severe criticism and radical alteration at Crisp's hand, and was talked about between other members of the Burneian circle.

Then, it may be asked, what had she? She had much. She had an eye for character—external character, no doubt, chiefly, but still an eye for character—such as nobody else born within many years of her had. And she had, moreover, from almost her earliest youth till almost past her fortieth year, the most extraordinarily fertile field,

the most extraordinarily stimulating atmosphere, of character study. The eighteenth century is admittedly the special century of the word "Society;" and Fanny Burney was in the very hotbed of the English eighteenth century. The habits of her family were scribbulative; its society was immense, various, incomparable. She might, if she had been more pert and less modest, have ascribed on her Diary the slightly altered line—

"We've had Johnson and Burke; all the wits have been here."

To her clear eyes, and her ready if not very critical pen, there presented themselves from the early days in Poland Street, through those in Queen Square, and most of all in the *domus exilis Newtonia*, through Streatham and Mrs Montagu's peacock saloon, and all the rest, to the stately if sometimes dismal halls of Windsor and St James's, and the dismal and not at all stately apartments of Kew, the phantasmagoria of all sorts of society. She registered it in her novels and in her diary alike, but best in the latter, with unflagging vigour, if with unequal success, while, as that passage from *Ernest Maltravers* which I have quoted puts it, "the novelty of life quickened the apprehension." At about middle age the stars grew less propitious. The actual society of London seems to have become decidedly less interesting and stimulating. The great wits of "the Club," who,



partly by accident and partly by the fact of Burke's connection with politics, had <sup>MME.</sup> made a junction between statesmanship <sup>D'ARBLAY.</sup> and literature, died. The younger Pitt, though not himself a boor, was utterly indifferent to letters. The Whigs assumed the ferocious and limited partisanship of a small and hopeless opposition, a farther gap being made by the split between them and the Prince of Wales. Mrs Thrale, that "Welsh fairy," had made herself impossible by her second marriage; Fanny herself put herself out of Court by her first and only one. M. D'Arblay appears to have been an eminently respectable person, but, I should think, rather a dull one; and he carried his wife off to France. During the Empire she mixed with an interesting if a rather priggish and doctrinaire society, but we have no record of it from her hands and hardly any of her participation in it from others. She came back, an old woman, to domestic sorrows, to "new faces, other minds;" and it is scarcely wonderful that she came back with only the ashes of her old gifts.

I have always thought that if "eloquent, just, and mighty Death," the most merciful as the mightiest of all potentates, had not removed Charlotte Brontë, we should have had something of a parallel in her to Madame D'Arblay's later writings, though Miss Brontë's harder fortunes and more passionate temper would not have consoled us by anything like the *Diary*. There, too, was the excitement—of a sufficiently different subspecies,

but parallel—of personal experience, with little aid  
MME. from books, and with no great fund of  
D'ARBLAY. independent artistic spirit. There, too,  
were the vivid, the original outpourings of this experience in novel-form. And there, too, had the experience been prolonged, must have been the break-down, the failure of the original impressions, with no new ones to make them good, the *Camillas* and the *Wanderers*—not perhaps the *Memoirs of Dr Burney*, because only an extraordinary conjunction of inauspicious stars could ever produce anything like that appalling production.

But this, it may be, is gratuitous; and it would be more gratuitous still to follow it out in the cases of other novelists of the same sex, as could, I believe (with the single exception of Miss Austen, the exception to all rules), be done. It is more germane to a reasonable matter to admit, and not to attempt to excuse the fact that Miss Burney—that at least Madame D'Arblay—was not one of those fortunate persons who, from the first to the last, with only human vicissitudes, persevere in being capable, who even persist in being great.

But if she was not one of these, she was one of the still not numerous band who, owing to no matter what cause, do delightful things. To her who gave us the Branghtons, Mr Smith, the first volume if not the two first volumes of *Cecilia*, Sir Sedley Clarendel even, let there be praise not in the lowest by any means. To her who gave us the quaint mixed presentation of Dr Burney's

visitors, the picture of a Johnson always amiable and sometimes apologetic, the sketches MME. of the sojourn of a young "lioness" in D'ARBLAY. the most various menageries, always with credit to herself and with the result of something like immortality to the other beasts—let there be praise perhaps higher still. Historians may add that Miss Burney has given us almost our only English picture of an English Court, drawn completely from the inside, without any ill nature such as that which invalidates the truth, if it heightens the zest, of books like Hervey's, with distinct literary talent, and with total freedom from "purpose." As a diarist Miss Burney is with Pepys and Evelyn, as a letter-writer with Walpole and Chesterfield. And unlike all these, except Horace, she is a novelist as well, while I must confess that though I like the kind of *The Castle of Otranto* better than the kind of *Evelina*, I must put *Evelina* a good deal higher in its kind than *The Castle of Otranto*.



## VIII.

### TWENTY YEARS OF POLITICAL SATIRE.

THOUGH it may seem to some a rather cowardly POLITICAL SATIRE. thing for a critic to say, I am myself much inclined to doubt whether any very satisfactory result comes of attempts to decide why this or that literary product came at that or this time. The "product-of-the-circumstances" theory was a very pretty and ingenious toy, which, like many toys in literature, in philosophy, and in other departments of toy-making, amused the town for a time, but has now had its day. Too surely does the critic who is not blinded by his affection for it discover that, if you pick your circumstances very carefully, you can indeed account for any product, but that you are exposed to two awkward inquiries—"How about the other circumstances which you have neglected?" and "Were not these circumstances on which you lay stress present at other times when the product was *not* produced?"

Of course we can see in general why certain

times—the time when Greece became, from an insignificant collection of petty states POLITICAL the most formidable power in the SATIRE. Mediterranean, the time of the completest and most unchallenged Roman domination, the time when the “Dark” blossomed into the “Middle” Ages, the time of the Reformation and the discovery of America, the time of the French Revolution — should all have been fertile in literature. As a man is most inclined to perpetrate literature when he is excited, so is a world. But when you come down to minor matters I doubt very much whether any such explanation is possible. I could make twenty very pretty ones for the singular development of political and semi-political satire during the last twenty years of the eighteenth century in England; but I should be the first to admit that one was no better than another, and that any twenty-first was likely to be as good, or at least as sufficient, as the whole of them. The popularity and novelty of the swinging easy measures of Anstey’s *Bath Guide*, the fact of the coincidence of the palmy days of the English public school and University system, as regards its peculiar style of scholarship, with the period when public school and University men had most direct, immediate, and easy entrance into politics, the keenness of political disputes, which till the Revolution itself broke out turned upon no vital question but were all the keener, the general

curiosity and partial annoyance caused by the  
POLITICAL supremacy of Pitt at so early an age,  
SATIRE. the absence of any passionate or absorbing school of literature to divert literary talent from mere sport—these and a dozen other things may be detected by any tolerably acute observer, and justified by any tolerably diligent student. It is sufficient for me to indicate them in passing.

The fact, however, of the existence of a peculiar kind of political and semi-political verse at this time—which has been rather imitated than continued since, and which is quite different from the political satire of a hundred years earlier, at the head of which towers *Absalom and Achitophel*, from the still earlier form of Butler, and from the later work in which Churchill mixed Dryden with vitriol and dirty water—is indisputable; and it is equally indisputable that it produced some of the most amusing stuff to be found anywhere in English literature. Its crowning achievement, the inimitable though constantly imitated “Poetry of the *Anti-Jacobin*,” has been frequently re-edited, the latest, or one of the latest, issues having appeared under the care of the late Mr Henry Morley. Mr Morley’s indefatigable industry in selecting and editing much of the best work of English authors in cheap, easily accessible, and sometimes by no means uncomely forms, could never be too gratefully acknowledged by any person of taste. And this great merit, joined to that of having, as his pupils unanimously testified,



inspired an unusual number of persons with his own love for our literature, may dis-  
 pense any generous critic from examin-  
 ing too narrowly his critical powers and his methods of editing.

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In the same volume Mr Morley included (chiefly it would appear for the reason that George Ellis was a contributor to both books) a very few specimens of the *Rolliad*, a much earlier and less finished production on the other side of politics, but, allowing for the absence of two such wits as Canning and Frere, not so much less amusing. As his concern was with the work of the trio exclusively, he also gave the *Microcosm* and other non-political matter. My aim being different, the subjects of this paper will be the *Rolliad*, with its dependent *Political Eclogues*, *Probationary Odes*, and *Political Miscellanies* at one end, and the *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin* at the other, with, between them, the exceedingly diverting work of Peter Pindar.

The *Rolliad* (as its facetious authors themselves record, with greater literal accuracy than attaches to all their statements) "owed its existence to the memorable speech of the member of (*sic*) Devonshire on the first discussion of the Westminster scrutiny" which followed the famous Westminster election of 1784—the contest between Fox and Sir Cecil Wray. The *Political Eclogues*, and the *Probationary Odes for the Laureateship*, ostensibly occasioned by Whitehead's death,

followed in 1785; while the *Political Miscellanies* were originally appended to the *Rolliad* itself, or rather to the criticisms of and specimens from that imaginary epic. They were all the work of a knot of literary Whigs—for Ellis, who was afterwards a staunch Tory, then had Whiggish leanings—mostly members of Brooks's, mostly personal friends of Fox, and all animated by the keenest dislike of the boy Minister, Pitt. Various "keys" have, as in other cases of the same kind, indicated, no doubt more or less correctly, their names, though not all the pieces are attributable with certainty. Dr Lawrence, the friend of Burke, seems to have been the guiding spirit, and he was assisted by Lord John and Lord George Townshend; by two clever Irishmen, Tickell and Fitzpatrick; sometimes by Richard Burke; by a still cleverer compatriot of theirs, Tierney; once or twice by Sheridan; by General Burgoyne, who, as is well known, was not quite so inefficient with the pen as with the sword; and, besides others known or unknown, by Ellis, then a little over thirty, author only of some contributions to the once famous Bath-Easton Vase, and of a few other light verses in the eighteenth century manner, but already a very wide, careful, and accomplished student of literature. It has been thought with some reason that the rondeaux which figure among the *Rolliad* verses, for the first and last time for many years

in English literature are due to him.\* The variety, indeed of the form of the *Rolliad* is one of its principal charms. The subjects are tolerably numerous—the Westminster election, the wickedness of Hastings and Impey, the follies and clownishness of the title-hero Mr Rolle (a Devonshire squire of great wealth, popularity, and power, who was obnoxious to the Whigs as a pillar of Pittism in the west), Sir Cecil Wray, Sir Joseph Mawbey, Dr Prettyman, and “those about” Pitt generally, with, for a constant resource and change whenever other subjects grew scarce or stale, Pitt himself, his policy, his character, and above all his supposed dislike of women. On this latter theme the wits were never tired of descanting, despite the discouraging fact that the British public obstinately refused to see the joke. Nor has political satire ever gone quite so far in this direction since. Mealy-mouthed persons have thought that the Anti-Jacobin writers gave themselves some license, but they never came anywhere near the *Rolliad*. Indeed, short as was the interval between the two books, it may be doubted whether public sentiment would have endured it if they had.

It would, however, be quite a mistake to imagine that the appeal of the *Rolliad* lies in mere scurrility. On the contrary, it is un-

\* A copy, however, of the 1799 edition, with apparently contemporary pencil notes, which my friend Mr Austin Dobson has lent me, attributes them to Lawrence.



commonly good fun, and, Tory as I am, I have not  
POLITICAL the least hesitation in admitting that  
SATIRE. now, and for some time to come, the  
Whig dogs, with Lawrence and his pack on one  
side, and Wolcot, he by himself, on the other, had  
very much the best of it. Pitt's notorious indiffer-  
ence, despite his scholarship, to English letters and  
English men of letters may have had something to  
do with this, but so it was. Nothing on the other  
side could touch the *Rolliad* and "Peter" till  
the French Revolution made half these Whig  
songsters themselves Tories, and considerably  
softened even the "savage Wolcot" himself.  
The *Rolliad* suffers, of course, from certain in-  
evitable drawbacks of almost all political litera-  
ture: the principal questions are not excessively  
interesting, the minor ones utterly dead and  
forgotten, there are constant allusions which  
hardly anybody, and some that probably no  
one, understands. The work, as all work done  
by a great number of hands must be, is very  
unequal. But the sparkle of it, the restless  
energy, the constant change of form and front,  
the vitalities in short, are very attractive: especi-  
ally, no doubt, because they are at least often  
combined with good literary form.

The thing was, of course, not original: it had  
more or less immediate ancestors in the mis-  
cellanies of Swift, Pope, Arbuthnot, and Gay,  
and its lineage might easily be traced even  
farther back. But I think that any one who

reads the *Rolliad* will perceive in it that note of noteworthiness which consists in being POLITICAL much more like what has come after it SATIRE. than what came before it. Its epigrams are somewhat out of date—the epigram proper, more's the pity, has been very little cultivated of late. Its Virgilian parodies appeal less than they appealed to a generation in which almost every educated man knew his Virgil by heart. Its skits of verse preserve the Popian style in a way which reminds us that that style was still omnipotent. And yet it has those vital marks which make the better class of literary work in all ages seem modern to the tolerably well-read reader. We should, alas!—for engraving has gone out with epigrams—find a difficulty in getting anything so well engraved nowadays as its frontispiece, with a genealogical tree starting out of the bowels of Duke Rollo and bearing roundels recording how divers Rolles were unfortunately “sus. per coll.,” or its title-page vignette, neatly exhibiting the arms of the family—three French rolls *or* between two rolls of parchment proper—and a demi-Master of the Rolls (Kenyon) for crest. But the text might (let us hope it would have been written equally well) have been, for most of its turns and traits, written yesterday. “Mr Rous spoke for two hours to recommend expedition. . . Sir Cecil's tastes, both for poetry and small beer, are well known; as is the present unfinished state of his newly-fronted house in Pall Mall.”

These little flashes show the sprightliness of  
POLITICAL the authors, but soon they rise to  
SATIRE. greater things and grapple with the  
“Virtuous Boy” himself:

Pert without fire, without experience sage,  
Young with more art than Shelburne gleaned from age,  
Too proud from pilfered greatness to descend,  
Too humble not to call Dundas his friend,  
In solemn dignity and sullen state,  
This new Octavius rises to debate.

The parody of Pope or, at least, of Akenside is good, but the true merit of the thing is that it gives us, as all political satire should give us, the real points in the object which were unpopular with his foes. The lines on Dundas are better still, and it is amusing to remember that both pieces are thought to be by Ellis:

For true to public Virtue's patriot plan,  
He loves the Minister and not the Man ;  
Alike the advocate of North and Wit,  
The friend of Shelburne, and the guide of Pitt.  
His ready tongue with sophistries at will,  
Can say, unsay, and be consistent still ;  
This day can answer and the next retract,  
In speech extol and stigmatise in act ;  
Turn and re-turn, whole hours at Hastings bawl,  
Defend, praise, thank, affront him, and recall ;  
By opposition he his King shall court ;  
And damn the People's cause by his support.

But it is not in this solemn kind of work that the book shows its charms. These lie in such things



as the famous passage which, from having been frequently quoted, is probably known to many who do not know another line of it: POLITICAL  
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Ah ! think what danger on debauch attends :  
 Let Pitt, once drunk, preach temperance to his friends ;  
 How as he wandered darkling o'er the plain,  
 His reason drowned in Jenkinson's champagne,  
 A rustic's hand, but righteous fate withstood,  
 Had shed a Premier's for a robber's blood.

As these lines are generally quoted, a pleasant prose postscript to them is omitted in praise of "the wonderful skill of our poet who could thus bring together an orange girl [for the illustration has crowned a passage on temperance] and the present pure and immaculate Minister, a connection which it is more than probable few of our readers would have in any way suspected." And so poor Pitt gets equally laughed at for his proneness to one foible and his abstinence from another, a device never to be forgotten by those who lampoon statesmen. This is at once a neat and a quotable gird : of the others on the same subject most are not quotable, though there is an exception in the following very agreeable epigram (on the attempted coalition between the Duke of Portland and Mr Pitt, which failed because the parties could not agree as to what was "fair and equal") :

On fair and equal terms to plan  
 A union is thy care ;  
 But trust me, Powis, in this case  
 The *equal* should not please his Grace,  
 And Pitt dislikes the *fair*.

Nor is English the only language in which the POLITICAL SATIRE. hapless Rolle, his chief, and their friends are epigrammatized. Latin, French, Italian, even Greek (very fair Greek, though "without the accents"), figure, and in a parcel of "foreign epigrams" it is by no means uninteresting to read by chance on the same page a mention of the "University of Gottingen" and the name "Casimir." For the wits of the Anti-Jacobin undoubtedly knew their *Rolliad* well, and one of them, as we have said, had the best cause to know it.

The *Political Eclogues* which follow the *Rolliad* proper are amusing enough though a little obvious, the best of them being the first, where Lawrence turns "Formosum pastor" into a gross but very funny assault on George Rose. But the *Probationary Odes* must rank higher, and if they were a little more compressed would rank higher still. They are but half political, and sometimes almost purely literary, till the *infandus dolor* (let me be permitted to speak in character) smarts again, and a whole sheaf of epigrams is fired at Mr Pitt's modesty, Sir Cecil Wray's statesmanship, and Dr Prettyman's apostolic virtues. Poor Tom Warton, a most excellent person and a very nice verse-writer in his day, is a constant butt, probably as the most likely actual candidate, and the Pittites come in for indiscriminate punishment with mere blue-stockings and busybodies. Here is imitated the stately style of the man who was not born to

be Johnson's biographer, though he thought he was, dropping at the end into the art-  
less verse :

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Here lies Sir John Hawkins,  
Without his shoes and stockings.

Here poor Hannah More, after some most improper insinuations, is made to say, "Heavens! what would this amiable baronet [Sir Joseph Mawbey] have been with the education of a curate!" Here Mrs George Anne Bellamy draws a delightful picture of herself "in a clean hackney coach, drawn by grey horses, with a remarkably civil coachman, fainting in my Cecil's arms." Here Warren Hastings's more laboured style is hardly caricatured in this description of the advocate who did his very best to lose him his cause, Major Scott:—"I can venture to recommend him as an impenetrable arguer; no man's propositions flowing in a more deleterious stream; no man's expressions so little hanging on the thread of opinion." And then come the odes themselves—Wray, Mulgrave, Mawbey, Macpherson, Wraxall, and a score more compete. A very bad and impossible imitation of Dundas's Scotch—the worst thing in the whole book, and showing how necessary it was that Burns and Sir Walter should show Englishmen what Scotch was really like—is redeemed a little later by a capital Hibernian pendant due to Fitzpatrick, and supposed to be Lord Mountmorres, a name of tragic associations in our day, but then that of a



favourite butt. This pindaric must have delighted  
POLITICAL Thackeray, and is very like his own  
SATIRE. Irish verse. Even better is the ode  
assigned to Thurlow, where the redoubtable Chan-  
cellor's favourite verb accompanies the piece all  
through with the most delectable crashes, the  
epode, if I may so call it, containing rather more  
d—ns than there are lines. And last of all we  
have the *Political Miscellanies*, which in a manner  
complete these odes, and in which most of the  
epigrams proper and minor pieces above referred  
to will be found. There is no doubt too much  
of the thing on the whole, but that is the fate of  
books that appear in parts and instalments.

Clever as the *Rolliad* is, interesting and stimulat-  
ing as it proved to its own and the succeeding  
generations (it may give it an additional zest to  
some readers to know that in his famous essays  
on Hastings, Pitt, and others, Macaulay was evi-  
dently thinking of it far more often than any  
definite references show), the little finger of that  
prince of English lampooners who called himself  
Peter Pindar was thicker than the loins of any one  
of its company of wits. I have at different times  
of my life read Peter thrice right through (a very  
considerable task, for the standard edition of him,  
though it is said not to be complete, contains more  
than two thousand five hundred pages), and each  
time I have been more convinced that if he had  
only been a little more of a scholar, and a great  
deal more of a gentleman, he would have been a

very great man indeed. As it is, his mere cleverness is something prodigious. But in POLITICAL the first place, he had very little, or a SATIRE. very intermittent, sense of style, and the ungirt flow of his Muse's gown is often far too slatternly. In the second place, he was a dirty Peter (dirty with a French rather than an English dirtiness, sniggering and Voltairian), a scurrilous Peter, a malevolent Peter, a Peter to whom at least in his flourishing days *non erant lachrymæ rerum*, a Peter who could beslaver George the Fribble at the moment that he was assuming airs of Republican independence towards George the Farmer, a Peter thoroughly coarse in grain and fibre, a Bœotian buzzard masquerading as a Theban eagle. To such bad language does he give irresistible temptation every now and then. And in another minute his shrewdness, his unexpected and delightful quips, the good-humour which in him was consistent with ill-nature, above all, as I have said, his prodigious cleverness, make one almost like, and very much more than almost admire him.

John Wolcot was born at Dodbrooke, a suburb of Kingsbridge in Devonshire, which is or was the head if not sole quarters of the manufacture of "white ale"—a rather terrible liquor which is supposed to represent the real Saxon brewage. Perhaps it was due to this that the future Peter was fond of ale all his life, and of cakes likewise. While he was still young, he went to live at Fowey, the quaintest if not the prettiest town in Cornwall,

with an uncle who was a doctor, and was educated  
POLITICAL for his uncle's profession at Fowey itself,  
SATIRE. at Bodmin, in France, and in London. When he was nearly thirty, one of his Cornish neighbours, Sir William Trelawney, was made Governor of Jamaica, took Wolcot with him, and made him "Physician-General" to the island. Then a thing happened which could hardly have happened at any other time than the eighteenth century. Trelawney thought he could give Wolcot better patronage in the Church, sent him to England to get ordained, and actually presented him to a living on his return. A more unclerical cleric than Wolcot perhaps never existed in our country. His morals were not only decidedly but avowedly and ostentatiously loose; and if he had any religion at all, it would seem to have been a sort of Gallic willingness to admit the existence of an easy-going *Etre Suprême*. He had, however, apparently no great opportunities of corrupting or scandalizing the faithful in Jamaica; for one of the few things personally recorded of him is that no congregation usually appeared at his church, whereupon, after decently waiting ten minutes, he and the clerk would adjourn to the neighbouring sea-shore, and shoot ring-tailed pigeons. When he returned to England, as he did before long at Trelawney's death, he seems to have given up all views as to clerical profession or preferment, and resumed the practice of medicine in Cornwall. Here he discovered the painter Hoppy or Opie (a



benefit which British art could have done without), and wrote poetical jests on his POLITICAL neighbours. His love of art, which was SATIRE. sincere and on the whole judicious, seems to have been the immediate cause of his beginning, in 1782, the series of odes to the Royal Academicians, which made a considerable stir, was continued annually for a time, and drew him once more to London. Here he remained for some quarter of a century, writing steadily for the booksellers despite the calamity of blindness which latterly fell on him. As a very old man he returned to Cornwall, and died there in 1819.

A great deal of Wolcot's work, all of which was published under the name of "Peter Pindar, Esq.," is not political at all. His biography has been very scantily written, but I should think it at least probable that the actual determination of his lampooning powers against Farmer George was due in great part to Farmer George's patronage of West. With West, Peter, who as has been said was really a good, though a harsh, partisan, and whimsical art critic, could not away. The King's taste in music, and his parsimony towards musicians, were fresh faults in Wolcot's eyes. He had inherited the good old British aversion to "virtuosity," not in the sense of fiddles, but of collecting and what are now called scientific pursuits. The British Museum, the Royal Society, Sir Joseph Banks, Count Rumford, Sir William

Hamilton (as archæologist, not as husband), and  
POLITICAL  
SATIRE. other similar things and persons, were  
all obnoxious to Peter; and as most  
of them were not unwelcome at Windsor and  
Buckingham House, the vials of Peter's wrath  
were all the more freely emptied on the Royal  
occupant of those palaces. If he wanted more  
stimulus, it was supplied by the fact that some  
well-known west-country persons, whom for this  
or that reason he disliked, were King's men.  
He too laughed at Rolle, and at Lord Mount-  
Edgcumbe. He uses the most terrific language  
concerning Mr Justice Buller. About the middle  
of his literary career, Gifford, a Devonshire man  
like himself, aroused in him the kind of frantic  
hatred which that strange personage seems to  
have had the gift of arousing, and which Wolcot  
vented in verse and in prose scarcely less furious  
than the almost Bedlamite scream of Hazlitt's much  
later "Letter." For all these personal reasons  
and others, rather than, as it seems to me, from  
any definite political predilections or antipathies,  
Peter fixed on the King, occasionally distributing  
a share of his attentions to the King's favourite  
Minister :—

(Yes : I detested Pitt and all his measures,  
And wrote *Willippics* on administration,

as he says somewhere), to that Minister's associates,  
Jenkinson, Rose, Dundas, and to certain noblemen

and Court favourites. Of these were the Lord Salisbury who enriched Peter's "Mar-  
gate Hoy" with the lines—

POLITICAL  
SATIRE.

Happy, happy, happy fly !  
Were I you, and were you I !  
But you will always be a fly  
And I remain Lord Salisbury—

(and who, as another authority tells us, used actually to stuff all the carriage pockets of the post-chaises he travelled in with original manuscript verses), Lord Cardigan, the Duke of Leeds, and others. Finally a large, if not the largest, portion was given to Queen Charlotte and the officials, especially the German officials, of the household.

There is no doubt, though there are happy strokes all about his work, that posterity has been (as it generally though not always is) right in fixing on Peter's personal lampoons on the King and, in the good old sense, his "family" as the things to remember Peter by. The "Odes to the Academicians" are very good, "Sir Joseph Banks and the Emperor of Morocco" excellent, many other things of the same kind capital. "Bozzy and Piozzi" I am inclined to think the very best thing of its particular kind ever written: the singular folly of the various claimants to the "showmanship" of Johnson could hardly be better ridiculed than in these answering strains of James and the Lady. In serious eighteenth century verse ("Know, lovely virgin, thy deluding art,



Hath lodged a thousand scorpions in my breast,"  
POLITICAL and so forth) of which Wolcot, strange  
SATIRE. to say, has left copious specimens, he  
may be a little better or a little worse than Hayley,  
though he could sometimes turn a very happy half-  
serious epigram, as here :

Ah ! tell me not that I grow old,  
That love but ill becomes my tongue ;  
Chloe, by me thou ne'er wert told,  
Sweet damsel, that *thou* wert too young !

In the same way, when he gets very serious even in his satire he is not usually good, perhaps because he then imitates Churchill, without possessing Churchill's indubitable gift of Drydenian verse. His denunciation of Lord Lonsdale, for the not very terrible crime of pointing out to the inhabitants of Whitehaven that, pending a final decision as to his legal liability for the sinking of ground above his coal-mines, it would be necessary for him, at great loss to himself as well as to them, to suspend the working, is one of the funniest examples of explosion of good useful wrath through the touch-hole that I know. Wolcot's best literary mood is that of a cat—not a cat in a rage, but a cat in a state of merriment, purring and mumbling, and rolling about. In which state, as all judicious lovers of the animal know, you may look out for a shrewd scratch or bite shortly as part of the game. When he gets really "savage" (the epithet Macaulay assigns to him) he is seldom amusing.

His best form is such as this, which I take almost at random from his longest and most famous poem, the piece with the ugly name : POLITICAL  
SATIRE.

Thus, when Burgoyne, opposing all the Fates,  
Defied, at Saratoga, General Gates,  
Sudden the hero dropped his threatening fist,  
And wisely deemed it folly to resist.

I could write a long dissertation to show why I can never read or repeat to myself "defied, at Saratoga, General Gates," without laughing, but it is better to laugh again and not write it.

Of this mood the almost world-famous visit to Whitbread's brewery house (the somewhat delusive title of which is "Instructions to a Celebrated Laureate"), and (in the Devonshire dialect which no one has ever written so well as Wolcot) the Royal visit to Exeter, are the best known and certainly among the best examples. But it is impossible to turn over many pages of Peter (even in his late and rather chapfallen *Tristia*, where it is hard to be very certain whether his jokes about making friends with the powers that be are jokes on the right or the wrong side of the mouth) without finding instances of it. I do not know whether he has ever been "selected." It might be impossible to perform that always dubious and dangerous process on a person who has as much of the satyr as of the satire. But on the face of him few writers call for it more. Here, as indeed

was noted above, Wolcot avenges the *carum*  
 POLITICAL *caput* of Fanny Burney on her enemy  
 SATIRE. Schwellenberg in so dreadful a manner  
 that even the soul of Daddy Crisp, with all his  
 affection for Fannikin and all his hatred of the  
 rest of the human race, might beg for mercy.  
 Elsewhere he is, though more playfully, almost  
 equally unkind to the great Mr Burke, for no  
 particular reason that I can discover, inasmuch  
 as they were at the time on the same side gener-  
 ally, except that Wolcot, who was a John Bull  
 to the core, hated Scotchmen and Irishmen. This  
 is horribly irreverent—

When Mister Burke, so famous for fine speeches,  
 From trope to trope a downright rabbit skipping,  
 Meant, schoolboy-like, to take down Hastings' breeches,  
 And give the noble governor a whipping.

And on the next page there is a much longer but  
 equally uncomplimentary simile for the Edmundian  
 eloquence. It would shock the admirable decency  
 of the present day to know the epithet which, at  
 the very opening of an ode, he gives to those  
 useful functionaries, the Lords of the Bedchamber.  
 But he was never quite so happy as in dealing  
 with Great George our King himself; and if that  
 monarch, who really knew something about litera-  
 ture, was half as good-natured as tradition makes  
 him out, he must have been as much amused by  
 Peter as it pleased Peter's waggery sometimes to  
 assert that he was. In such a mood Peter, offering



an amnesty to King and Queen, but maintaining the feud with the detested Schwellenberg, thus addresses his book : POLITICAL  
SATIRE.

Sweet babe ! to Weymouth shouldst thou find thy way,  
 The King, with curiosity so wild  
 May on a sudden send for thee and say :  
 " See, Charly ! Peter's child. Fine child, fine child !  
 Ring, ring, for Schwellenberg, ring, Charly, ring :  
 Show it to Schwellenberg, show it, show it, show it.  
 She'll say, ' Got dem de saucy stoopid thing ;  
 I hate more worse as hell what come from poet ! "

Perhaps the happiest, by the way, of these curious Royal repetitions which Peter was never tired of playing upon is in prose, and told in a note, to the effect that when the King was visiting Mount Edgcumbe, he strayed a little from the rest of the party to see a monument which had been put up to a departed pet pig named Cupid. Her Majesty Queen Charlotte called to him to know what he was looking at, and the King with perfect gravity replied, " Family grave, Charly ! family grave, family grave." And the two next best things attributed to the Royal pair are expressions of repentance and amendment for the (on the whole purely imaginary) crimes with which Master Peter thought good to charge them. Rebuking the horrid eagerness of the monster Pitt to oppress the public, His Majesty frankly declares :

" Yes ! yes ! I know, I know, the hounds are howling.  
 God, Pitt ! I don't, I don't much like their growling.  
 Hey, hey ? Growl, growl ? What, what ? Things don't go  
 right ?

Why, quickly, quickly, Pitt, the dogs may *bite* ?

POLITICAL  
SATIRE.

That would be bad, bad, bad, a sad mishap,  
Hey, Pitt, hey, hey? I should not like a *snap*."

And his consort magnanimously chimes  
in :

"I geef my chewells to de Peepel's sighs,  
All tings from Mistress Hastings as I gote ;  
I geef de fine pig diamond of Arcote,  
Iss, dat vich Rumbold geef, I geef again,  
Rader dan see de Peepels suffer pain.  
De Emperor presents, Lord ! I vil not tush,  
Although de duty coss so *very* mush."

For as Her Majesty unanswerably asks :

"Vat signifies de millions in our purses,  
If moneys do profoke de Peepel's curses?"

In one (and not the worst) of Wolcot's squibs,  
pretending to be silenced by the severer legislation  
which followed the excesses of the French, he  
laments sadly :

No more must we laugh at an ass,  
No more run on toppers a rig,  
Since Pitt gets as drunk as Dundas,  
And Dundas gets as drunk as a pig.

Now farewell to fair Buckingham House,  
To Richmond and Windsor and Kew,  
Farewell to the tale of the L——e,  
Mother Redcap ! and monarchs, adieu !

A worse thing came upon him and the other  
Opposition lampooners than the checks of the  
law, which so far as I know, were never seriously  
applied to any of them. Peter remained valiantly

singing, and years afterwards accomplished very respectable "Epistles to Mrs Clarke," POLITICAL and jeremiads on his own exclusion SATIRE. from the Carlton House *fêtes*. But the satiric Muse was tired of her escapade for some years in Whig company, or else was frightened back by the French Revolution to the older quarters where she had laughed of old with Aristophanes and Lucian, with Butler and Swift. On November the 20th, 1797, appeared the first number of the *Anti-Jacobin*, and three years later the *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin* was collected and published.

So much more is generally known about this book than about my earlier subjects, neither of which has, to my knowledge, been reprinted for many years, that it is the less necessary to say much about its authorship and intention here. That its name neatly and accurately expressed its purpose, that its editor was Gifford, and its most brilliant contributors Canning, Ellis, and Frere, though one or two others did good work, are matters of universal knowledge. Frere, who was the youngest, had also the cleanest political record of the three, for he was a Tory from the first, while Canning, as is well known, hovered a little before settling, and Ellis was a convert. Pitt cared nothing at all for literary praise or blame, and is said to have addressed to Ellis the neatest quotation of that century of classical quotations next to Harley's famous consolation to Prior. Both were present when some person,



thoughtless, ignorant, or malicious, asked Ellis  
POLITICAL about the *Rolliad*, whereupon Pitt  
SATIRE. promptly set any possible awkward-  
 ness straight by the line:

Immo age et a prima dic, hospes, origine nobis.

I have not observed that many of the persons who are justly proud of calling the poet "Vergil" quote him as aptly as that. But whatever the antecedents of any of the three might be, they all thoroughly meant business in these attacks on the Jacobins English and French, and the enemies of Pitt. The great opening poem on Mrs Brownrigg is most probably assigned to all the three, the still greater "Knifegrinder" to Canning and Frere. In the third of these charming parodies (which, oddly enough, Southey never seems to have had magnanimity enough quite to forgive—the weakest thing I know about him), the delightful dactyls about the "nice clever books by Tom Paine the philanthropist" Ellis may have shared. It must have been a little awkward for him when Canning in an early number gibed at those who

sit

Midst Brooks's elders on the bench of wit,  
 Where Hare, Chief Justice, frames the stern decree,  
 While with their learned brother sages three,  
 Fitzpatrick, Townshend, Sheridan, agree.

For his own name had been in the commission  
 with these very same learned brethren a bare

dozen years before, and the *Rolliad* was the result of 'it. But these little accidents POLITICAL SATIRE. will happen, and he had been personally and in a rather unmannerly fashion ("by Ellis' sapient prominence of nose") attacked in the piece that Canning was ridiculing. At any rate there was no mistake about him now. He seems to have written by himself the capital parody of "Acme and Septimius"—"Fox with Tooke to grace his side," with its refrain :

He spoke, and to the left and right,  
Norfolk hiccupped with delight.

And he took part in nearly all the most famous things of the collection, "The Loves of the Triangles," "The Progress of Man," "The Rovers," "New Morality," and the rest.

It is important to observe that all these pieces are in a more or less direct sense political, and much more so than is sometimes thought nowadays. Professor Morley, perhaps to soothe his own or other persons' feelings, talks of the *Anti-Jacobin* as chiefly an attack on "false sentiment" generally. "The Loves of the Triangles" has often been regarded as a mere literary "skit" on Darwin and his likes; and "The Rovers" has a false air of being pretty free from politics. Look a little deeper, and different conclusions will, I think, be reached. It was no doubt a god-send to the Anti-Jacobins that so much external folly of various kinds happened to be associated

with the maintenance of the new opinions in  
 POLITICAL politics and (horrid word, then not in-  
 SATIRE. vented!) sociology. But Canning's inexhaustible wit, Frere's audacious humour and whimsical erudition (some of his prose notes are unsurpassable), Ellis's eighteenth century polish and Voltairian elegance, always drove straight at the principles of innovation generally, of fantastic sympathies and antipathies, of topsy-turvy theories, which underlay the frippery of the outside. The great Mr Higgins, the eidolon-author of the two didactic poems and the drama (ah, when will researches in St Mary Axe give us the "Catastrophe of Mr and Mrs Gingham and the episode of Hipponia," the "Conspiracy against the Ordinate," and the scene in "The Rovers" where "several children: fathers and mothers unknown," are "produced on all sides"?), constantly enunciates in those very confidential letters which he wrote to his treacherous editors, the exact sentiments which we know so well to-day. When he talks about privilege and prejudice, about the vicious refinement of civilised society in regard to marriage, the cumbrous establishments which the folly, pride, and self-interest of the worst part of our species have heaped up, the certainty of man's perfectibility were he freed from kingcraft and priestcraft and other incidents of the present social system—all these things are perfectly unmistakable. We have them with us as fresh as ever. Substitute *The Doll's House* for *Stella*, read "Fabian



Society" for poor Mr Higgins's clubs (but the works of the Fabian Society are not so amusing as Mr Higgins's), and 1798 becomes any present year of grace you please. The very names of "Sedition's evening host" are startling; and we can fill in the blanks of that great hymn with names "after the chances and changes of the times," according to the author's direction, without the slightest difficulty. There can be no manner of reasonable doubt that if it had not been for the maudlin Socialism (they did not call it Socialism then, but it was the same thing) of Southey's sapphics and dactyls, the windy Republicanism of his poem on Marten, his metrical freaks would have been left alone by the mockers. Payne Knight and Darwin had follies enough; but if the one had not been avowedly, and the other in a sort of half-hearted way Jacobinical, they too might have disported themselves in safety. Even "The Rovers" is full of politics. Does the reader think that "Crown and Anchor" in that beautiful jumble of Beefington's ("England . . . our country . . . Magna Charta . . . it is liberated . . . a new era . . . House of Commons . . . *Crown and Anchor* . . . opposition") is mere miscellaneous farce? Not in the least. It was at the authentic *Crown and Anchor* tavern that, on Fox's birthday, the Duke of Norfolk gave "Our Sovereigns' health—the Majesty of the People." The dignity, chivalry, and courage of the immortal waiter

POLITICAL  
SATIRE.

enforce the great doctrine that "the conscience  
POLITICAL of a poor man ought to be more valuable  
SATIRE. to him than that of a prince in proportion as it is generally more pure." The satirists may, according to the excellent advice of their own troubadour, "by a song conceal their purposes." But those purposes are constantly what they are in one place avowed to be—to ridicule and baffle the appetite for change, to enforce the old proverb that "seldom comes a better," to confound ideas of equality, and the like. The *Anti-Jacobin* is thus not only more constantly but much more thoroughly political than the gibes of Brooks's, because patronage and power were in the hands of a thin man who did not like women instead of in those of a fat man who did, or the personal lampoons of Wolcot on the foibles and favourites of a king.

The fact of this unity and directness of purpose must, I think, be counted in for some of the merit of the book, as well as the fact that Ellis had incomparably stronger colleagues now than before, and that the crimes of the political and the follies of the social Jacobins gave a much better subject. At any rate the merit is certainly much greater. Of "The Rovers," that Ibsenism before Ibsen, it is impossible to tire. I am told that it was once tried on the stage and failed. This does not surprise me, for even *The Critic* is said not to be popular now, and "The Rovers" requires much more literary, political, and mis-

cellaneous knowledge to appreciate it than *The Critic* does. But I believe that all boys of any brains, however little they may know of its antecedents, delight in "The Rovers": and I am sure that all middle-aged and aged persons of any sense delight in it. Nobody can exceed me in respect for Southey: but if I had to choose between his poems in the vein which the *Anti-Jacobin* parodied and the parodies of the *Anti-Jacobin*, I should certainly take the parodies. The "Address to the Gunboats" (some "Keys" attribute it to Lord Morpeth; but he never could have written it, and if the translation of *Pictis Puppibus* is not Frere's or, less probably, Canning's, I am no two-legged creature) is not, I believe, so great a favourite with some as it is with me. But surely the last couplet—

Beware the *Badger's* bloody pennant,  
And that d——d invalid lieutenant !—

has an extraordinary charm. All the world is agreed as to the "Elegy or Dirge" on Jean Bon Saint-André, and I suppose there is not much more difference on the two didactic poems. Time may make one gouty and grey-haired, may bring disappointment at things that are not and disgust at things that are, but scarcely shall it deprive us of the faculty, nay, the irresistible need of laughter as the well-known words recur:

The feathered race with pinions skim the air,  
Not so the mackerel, and still less the bear ;



as

POLITICAL Each shepherd clasped with undisguised delight  
SATIRE. His yielding fair one—in the captain's sight ;

as that incomparable note of Frere's to "blue-eyed wanton" "*Hyperbola*: not figuratively speaking as in rhetoric, but mathematically, and therefore blue-eyed;" or that other on "Pons Asinorum," where Mr Higgins, with the combined fairness of a man of science and an enlightened politician, after observing that "having frequently watched companies of asses during their passage of a bridge he never discovered in them any symptoms of geometrical instinct," admits that "with Spanish asses, which are much larger (*vide* Townsend's *Travels through Spain*) the case may possibly be different." And the whole is appropriately crowned with "The New Morality," wherein in truth the whole web of connection between the different modes of thought satirized is given.

Of course, it is impossible that political sympathy should not make one's enjoyment of such things rather keener. But as I have made no secret of the amusement with which I read the *Rolliad* and Peter Pindar, having in neither case any such sympathy with the writers, I do not think the difference here is likely to carry me very far to leeward of the truth in thinking that the superior excellence of the *Anti-Jacobin* lies not more in its greater literary polish than in the superior sanity and largeness of its spirit. Though the

personal satire is sometimes pretty sharp, it is never as in the other cases merely per- POLITICAL  
sonal; and I think I can imagine (I am SATIRE.  
rather inclined to think that I know one or two) persons who, though by no means sympathizing with Toryism, appreciate to the full the unsparing and unerring fashion in which the *Anti-Jacobin* lashes what may be called the Fool on the other side of politics;—the Fool who believes in political nostrums and political revolutions, the Fool who gushes over the inevitable and ineradicable inequalities of the world, the Fool who drops a tear over criminals, the Fool who fails to see that, though certain social rules may pinch individuals now and then, the permission of general license would simply make the world unworkable.

It is, I think, to this heightening and enlargement of the political aim that we must at any rate in part attribute the fact that the *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin* remains unsurpassed as a collection of political verse-satire. We have had excellent practitioners of that art since the century began. Moore, Praed, and Mansel produced, and there is at least one living writer who produces work which Canning himself need not have refused to sign. But all such writers have been exposed to the inconvenience that the main “dependence,” in the old phrase, of the political quarrel has not altered much, has altered very little, since 1800. As I have said, the inimitable prefaces of Mr Higgins reproduce themselves every day in our

midst, and "Divine Nonsensia" has found little POLITICAL or nothing new, call she it by what-  
SATIRE. ever new names, to talk about since she furnished subjects to "The Rovers" and "The Knifegrinder." But as yet, whatever may be coming, neither the excitement of popular imagination, nor the liberty of popular follies, nor the exaggeration of popular crimes, has equalled the state of things of 1793-1800. There has been no such death-grapple as there was then, no such storm for the Pilot to weather, no such topsy-turvifying of public sentiment as could bring men like Goethe and Coleridge and Southey (let it be remembered that each of them saw the error of his ways) to write the rubbish that kindled the "Singing Flames" of the *Anti-Jacobin's* correction. They were kindly flames\* after all, and a God did save the culprits—more happy than those referred to in Heine's famous warning. If the occasion comes again—which Heaven forbid!—why, let the same God send us "such hounds, such hawks, and such a leman"—such Anti-Jacobins and such a Pilot!

\* An American critic once gravely commented on the ignorance of the present writer in not knowing that Heine wrote "sengenden," "singeing." Possibly this was part of the "great American joke." If not, it can only be said, in the first place, that Heine did not; and in the second, that if he did, "why, the less Heine he."



## IX.

### THREE HUMOURISTS.

HOOK, BARHAM, MAGINN.

AMONG writers of the second or lower classes there are few who hold their places in THREE such a precarious fashion as humourists HUMOURISTS. of the second or lower class. Their brethren of the first class occupy perhaps the surest position of all. More than two thousand years have failed to lessen in the very slightest degree the laughter-moving powers of Aristophanes, and nearly two thousand have not affected those of Lucian. But it may be that even the greatest, at shorter distances and intervals from their own time, are in danger of temporary eclipses; and all but the greatest are in danger of eclipses which are only too likely to be more than temporary.

On two, at least, of the three jesters whose names are written above, the curse has certainly come; and I have been told, though I hope it is not true, that even *The Ingoldsby Legends* have fallen somewhat from the pride of place which

they held so long. It may be all the more interesting to survey them in a trio, a  
THREE HUMOURISTS. conjunction to which they lend themselves with unusual ease. They were all contemporaries in life and still more in literature; they all pursued a peculiar kind of humourous writing to which the institution, new in their day, of the lighter kind of periodical literature gave opportunities impossible before their date. All of them were distinctly convivial and not like their other contemporary, Hood, retiring and domestic in habits, though rollicking with the pen. Two of them were Bohemians in the fullest sense of the word. Two of them, but not the same two, were no mean scholars. All had the natural and rarely absent temperament of the humourist which makes him sometimes a staunch and pronounced Tory, and almost always an opponent of innovations in Church, in State, in manners, and in literature. All wrote a peculiar kind of easy verse with extraordinary facility, and two, at least, could sometimes drop, or rather rise, into something not merely facile.

When the tale is of three men in one tub, biographical particulars must necessarily be given as sparingly as possible. Indeed no one of the three lives was in the ordinary sense eventful; and a few dates and facts will be all that is necessary to place them conveniently. Theodore Hook was born in London, on September 22nd, 1788, of a musical and theatrical family which,

in the person of his elder brother and still more in that of his nephew, raised itself THREE to high consideration in the Church. HUMOURISTS. Theodore was sent to Harrow and to Oxford, but, as his official biographer says, "threw himself into the arms of the Muse," which would not, to an earlier generation, have conveyed the sense of "left the University with no degree and for no profession." Attracting the notice of the Regent by his convivial gifts he was appointed (in 1813) to a valuable place at Mauritius, in which he had Moore's ill-luck with, it would seem, much less excuse beforehand than Moore's and with very different consequences. Indeed conduct, as Mr Arnold would have said, was never even a hundredth part of Hook's life. Although when he came home (in 1818) both his baser and his nobler gifts brought him plenty of patronage and plenty of money, he never made any serious attempt to liquidate or compound his obligations to the Treasury, and at his comparatively early death (in 1840) a further *laches* (his omission to marry the mother of his children) caused everything that his family might have had left to them to be swept away. He had filled the interval with journalism of immense vivacity and not a little scurrility, with popular novel-writing, and with the fabrication of a vast amount of mainly impromptu matter of the amusing kind, most, if not all, of which has necessarily perished.

The next person on our list, Barham, is one of



the best known witnesses to the brilliancy of  
THREE Hook's apparent or real improvisa-  
HUMOURISTS. tions in the way of dining-room and  
drawing-room entertainment, he himself being  
singer, player, and extempore librettist. But the  
testimony to this is unanimous; and the gift made  
him, till his health broke and his spirits flagged,  
a welcome guest in rich men's houses. Then the  
end came, and there was nothing left of poor Mr  
Wagg but his batch of printed jestings, the rapidly  
fading memory of his conversational and enter-  
taining powers, a disapproval of his life which  
was not limited to Mrs Grundy, and one masterly  
piece of friendly but truthful criticism, Lockhart's  
article written for the *Quarterly Review*, and after-  
wards more than once reprinted alone.

Not so very different, though with fewer chances  
than Hook's, is the tale of the life of our second  
specimen of "bright broken Maginn," as the same  
Lockhart, this time in a rhyming epitaph almost  
unmatched for humorous pathos, described him—  
of "the Doctor" of *Fraser's*, "the Ensign" of *Black-  
wood's*, the part originator at least of the *Noctes  
Ambrosianæ*, the part original of Captain Shandon,  
the staunchest of Tories, one of the best of fellows  
(for, like Lockhart, "I ne'er heard of a sin" of  
an odious type, except in some Pecksniffian in-  
sinuations made long years after by S. C. Hall)  
and alas! the most improvident of men. He was  
born in Cork in 1793, was thoroughly educated  
first by his father, a schoolmaster, then at Trinity

College, Dublin, and for some time followed his father's vocation. But *Blackwood's* <sup>THREE</sup> *Magazine* came into being, and Maginn <sup>HUMOURISTS.</sup> seems to have gravitated to it much after the fashion described in verses about another person :—

How many wise ones for thy sake  
Have flown to thee and left off plodding !

Certainly Maginn was not an idle man even after this, nor did he immediately give up keeping school ; but from about the middle of 1820, when he paid a visit to Edinburgh, his heart was in the lighter journalism and the Bohemianism which then accompanied it as a matter almost of course. He soon went to London ; was introduced to Hook among editors, and Murray among publishers ; took a hand in the *John Bull* and the *Representative* and the *Standard* (if not also in the *Age* and other downright blackguardly prints) ; quarrelled with Blackwood ; set up *Fraser* ; enraged and fought with Grantley Berkeley ; translated Homer into ballads ; received five hundred pounds from Thackeray ; knew debts and duns and the Fleet ; was more than once befriended by Peel, who whatever faults he may have had was good to men of letters ; and died of consumption at Walton-on-Thames on August 21st, 1842.

The contrast between these two lives, unfortunate at the best and at the worst not

easily to be defended from unkind adjectives, and that of the third, which is placed  
THREE HUMOURISTS. between them, is, as our fathers would have said, "odd and pretty," and withal very English. Neither Hook nor Maginn had, it is true, Barham's advantages to start with; but it is equally true that both were put in tolerably straight roads and chose to fall out of them. Richard Harris Barham, though as thorough a humourist as either of them, and of anything but an unsociable or unconvivial disposition, found his feet set on the King's highway from the first and never seems to have been tempted to stray out of it. Whether the Barhams were really descended from Reginald Fitzurse and the Irish Macmahons I really do not know; the author of *The Ingoldsby Legends* is perhaps not the man from whom one would accept an unproved pedigree with implicit and childlike faith. But they were certainly a good Kentish family, and Tapton (the elongation to Tappington was venial) was an authentic manor-house. Barham himself, however, was not born there, but at Canterbury on December 6th, 1788; his father, a stout and cheerful person but a little of a spendthrift, making amends by dying and leaving his son to a minority of fourteen or fifteen years. This he spent at St Paul's School and Brasenose College, meeting at Oxford Theodore Hook, who for a short time was an undergraduate at St Mary's Hall. It would appear that Barham himself was a little volatile.



A severe illness, however, sobered him ; he took orders, married pretty early, and was presented to a living in Romney Marsh, <sup>THREE</sup> HUMOURISTS. the head-quarters of smuggling. Hence in 1821 he was transferred to a minor canonry at St Paul's, and from this time forward lived chiefly in London. His career was one of unostentatious, but real, work in his profession, varied by the writing of some novels (whereof the chief is *My Cousin Nicholas*) and of the famous verses by which he is still known. He died in 1845, the same year which was fatal to Sidney Smith, his friend and superior in the Pauline hierarchy.

And so turn we from the lives of these men to their works.

To one who begins the reading of Theodore Hook's novels for the first time, or with only a dim and distant remembrance of *Gilbert Gurney* and one or two more of the best, read at an easily amused period of youth, I should judge from my own experience that a certain thing is like to happen. He will remember how when Pendennis came to London Mr Doolan informed him that Mr Wagg got "three hundther pound" for every volume of these novels, and how Arthur at once began to calculate whether he himself might not, on the same terms, make an income of about five thousand a year. To tell the truth it is almost, if not quite, impossible to rank most of these productions high from any point of view. The carelessness and slovenliness of the mere

writing sometimes very nearly take away the  
THREE breath even of a reviewer of novels in  
HUMOURISTS. the present day. The matter is often  
 not much better than the form; and when one  
 remembers the flattering impromptu of Barham :

Says I, "Gadzooks !  
 That's Theodore Hook's,  
 Whose *Sayings and Doings* make such pretty books,"

and that this represents a general opinion of our  
 fathers, who were not fools, the thing becomes  
 exceedingly surprising.

For clumsy sentences and slovenly constructions  
 are not the only things to quarrel with. A more  
 good-natured, a wider, and a less technical criticism  
 will find endless faults and, perhaps, not very  
 many merits. Take for instance these very *Say-  
 ings and Doings*. The three series of them contain  
 ten stories of varying lengths: *Danvers*, *The  
 Friend of the Family*, *Merton*, *Martha the Gipsy*,  
*The Sutherlands*, *The Man of Many Friends*,  
*Doubts and Fears*, *Passion and Principle*, *Cousin  
 William*, and *Gervase Skinner*. Of these I do  
 not believe that at any time during the last forty  
 years any one, except possibly *The Sutherlands*  
 and certainly *Gervase Skinner*, would have had  
 the slightest chance of ranking as of even third-  
 rate merit. *Danvers* is a pointless and characterless  
 story of silly waste of money on the part of two  
 very harmless parvenus, enlivened at the opening  
 with one of those extravaganzas which from time

to time catch the popular taste, the disturbance created in a quiet household by the menagerie of a rich nabob. *The* <sup>THREE</sup> <sup>HUMOURISTS.</sup> *Friend of the Family* is a little better, but alternately sentimental and boisterous, and much characterised by that weakness of Hook's which Thackeray satirised by the suggestion of "putting the characters up a step in the peerage all round." *Merton*, which is extremely long, tells how a decidedly foolish hero missed a good wife and married a bad one, without any happy ending. Hook, to do him justice, was ambitious enough to scorn the happy ending; but he was hardly strong enough to manage its opposite. *Martha the Gipsy* is the shortest of the whole, and was considered in its day a very effective tale of terror. I can only say that though I am rather fond of tales of terror, and, I believe, an indulgent critic of them, it brings me for all its shortness nearer to a yawn than to a shudder.

*The Sutherlands* is a distinct relief, though there is not very much substance in it, and its merits are, as Hook's merits generally are, rather dramatic than narrative and less of comedy than of farce. Still the two brothers, the headlong George and the careful James, who come equally to grief,—the one marrying a girl not in the very least better than she should be, and the other expending endless diplomacy and a considerable sum of ready money on securing an unattractive and illegitimate heiress to a small annuity—are contrasted amus-



ingly enough and meet their fate in no disagreeable manner. Nearly as much may  
THREE  
HUMOURISTS. be said, though the thing is here even more directly farcical and was indeed actually dramatised, of *Doubts and Fears*, where a roué and lady-killer, who is separated from his wife, makes coincident assignations unawares both with her and with his daughter, and all is gas and gaiters afterwards. *The Man of Many Friends*, which comes between the two, is one of the hardest of all to read. *Passion and Principle* is a strange compound of good and bad. Francis Welsted's sojourns at the Holborn Inn and in the Dalston Academy are full of lively touches which (as do most of Hook's best things) show us where both Dickens and Thackeray with others of their contemporaries found models; and they are good to read to this day. But the trials of Welsted's beloved Fanny with a nabob soldier of equally detestable temper and character, the patronage of that struggling usher by a noble family, and the lamentable but scarcely pathetic end are all naught. *Cousin William* is half society and half sentiment; but to me, at least, almost wholly uninteresting.

Only *Gervase Skinner* seems to me readable now-a-days with genuine amusement right through. Even here there is a good deal of that mixture of simple exaggeration and of caricature which is called in French *charge*, and which is Hook's main resource. The devices by which Gervase, — a country squire who is economical "on principle,"

a fully middle-aged bachelor whose pre-contract to a young and pretty girl does not <sup>THREE</sup> prevent him from aspiring to illicit HUMOURISTS. joys, and a simple bumpkin who tries to be knowing and see life—is fleeced, tormented, and almost ruined are scantily probable at times. But still the thing is amusing, and it is salted and spiced all through by Hook's ingenious use of his unquestioned familiarity with theatrical things and theatrical people. The Fuggleston couple,—the wife an adventuress and a baggage ; the husband full enough of apparent *bonhomie* but one of those particularly ugly persons for whom modern English has no name, but of whom Shakespeare's contemporaries were very fond, though Shakespeare himself would have none of him—are what Hook's men and women are too seldom, alive, hit off once for all, and added to the permanent strength of the establishment of the army of Fiction.

Here, too, that peculiar kind of interest to which I have alluded above comes in very strongly. I feel that I owe an apology to the blameless and peerless Emily Fotheringay if I say that I do not think she would have been precisely what she is if Amelrosa Fuggleston, who was not at all blameless and only appeared peerless to a bumpkin Lothario, had not preceded her. In the same way Kekewich, the manager, stammers the language of no less a person than Mr Jingle who, both for professional and chronological reasons, may quite

probably have learnt it of him, though it is fair to  
THREE say that there are traces of this kind  
HUMOURISTS. of lingo in fiction much earlier, as far  
back, indeed, as the Mr Briggs of *Cecilia*. This  
quality of suggestion and ancestorship has, for  
those who read not merely for the story, a strong  
attraction. But of other attractions I must confess  
these *Sayings and Doings* seem to provide but a  
scanty and fragmentary banquet.

Nor are the other books much more remunerative. There is no doubt that tradition rather than positive acquaintance is right in holding *Gilbert Gurney* for the best of them. It is, if not a specially amiable or estimable, a sufficiently bright and cheerful example of the fiction of high jinks and high spirits—of, as Hook's great follower has it, the "British brandy and water" school of jollity. The things by which it is best, if not solely remembered,—the hoaxes of Daly, the mistaking of Gilbert for the Prince of Orange, the portrait of Tom Hill, and so forth,—are still relishing with a little good will even to rather difficult palates, and still delectable to boyish appetites and simple tastes generally. But even these are rather thin; and when they are left out of consideration the interest of the book is reduced almost to zero. There is scarcely any plot; the hero, though not a bad fellow, is a colourless nincompoop; the female characters (with the exception perhaps of Mrs Fletcher Green) have, in a less libellous sense than Pope's, no character at all: and the narrative jerks



or joints itself along in unconnected fyttes which might nearly, if not quite, as well be presented separately as short stories. THREE  
HUMOURISTS.

Faulty as it is, however, it is at any rate better than *Gurney Married*, of which all that can be said is that Gilbert is a greater fool than ever, his brother in a different way a greater fool than he, and the humour of the Nubleys, the governess and the children, very tragical mirth for the most part. In *Jack Brag* matters are not much mended by the hero being an offensive cad instead of a chuckle-headed gentleman. *Maxwell* has attracted most attention from the portrait sketch of Godfrey Moss, which is known to be almost a photograph of George the Fourth's unlucky led-parson Cannon; and the picture is certainly at first vivid if rather disgusting. But Moss has very little to do with the story, and his mannerisms—his "Neddums" and "Kittums" and the rest—become after a time as tiresome as they are irrelevant. *Peregrine Bunce* can plead that it was written when its author was almost entirely broken down,—indeed I believe he never finished it. But all the rest, *Cousin Geoffrey*, *All in the Wrong*, *Precepts and Practice*, *The Widow and the Marquis*, etc., exhibit the same faults with perhaps fewer merits than the books already noticed. Pictures of manners so stale and faded that it is impossible not to suspect the drawing of having been at first but superficial; characters lacking in the universal traits which alone give vitality; careless writing; construction

which is often no construction at all,—these things  
THREE meet one at every turn of leaf, at every  
HUMOURISTS. change of volume, and even when the  
laughter does provoke an echo,

Its voice is thin as voices from the grave.

With the best good will the reader is foiled ; and he shuts the last book, agreeing more heartily than ever with the aforesaid Mr Pendennis, when he thought more than forty years ago that these works were “not exactly masterpieces of the human intellect.”

Are we then to conclude that our fathers were fools? That is about the last conclusion which I, for one, will ever willingly accept. Indeed the answer which makes such a conclusion quite unnecessary was practically given almost when Mr Pendennis spoke, and in reply to him, by Lockhart, whose critical dicta are never to be lightly passed over, and may often, as here, be extended and inferred from with advantage. In a note to his biographical essay on Hook when it was reprinted, the critic draws special attention to the *rise* of Thackeray as qualifying certain remarks which he had made on the merits of Hook's novels. The fact is that during the late twenties and the thirties, the years of Hook's fame and fortune, the country was very badly off for novelists, and especially for novelists of modern and contemporary life. Nearly all Scott's best were written, and Miss Austen had ceased to write, when Hook

began; Dickens had but just appeared, and Bulwer not so very long, when Hook died. THREE  
Scott's line was different: Miss Austen HUMOURISTS.  
had made no school; and though novels were being written in ever increasing numbers their writers were for the most part all abroad in the novel proper. They could not get out of the tradition of Fielding and Smollett, itself a survival of the picaresque romance. Although the life of their heroes and heroines was supposed to be modern and actual, it had to be spiced with adventures, and adjusted to a sort of Odyssey (comic or tragic as the case might be) watered with the tears of sensibility or roused by the guffaws of broad farce. Except Miss Austen and perhaps Miss Ferrier, nobody had yet dared with conspicuous genius and success to depict purely ordinary life: for even Miss Edgeworth's work at its best is of an older fashioned kind. Hook, for all his talent, all his faculty, all his experience of the world, was certainly not the man to strike out the new line. It is perfectly obvious, not merely from his carelessness of style and story, but from consideration of the life he led, that he must almost always have written in a scrambling hurry. He was in fact a born improvisatore, and I should imagine that the *Sayings and Doings* (which brought him even more than the sum named by Mr Doolan, inasmuch as for one of the series he is said to have received two thousand pounds) cost him very little more labour or, in proportion, more time, than the famous



impromptu comediettas which he used to throw off  
THREE at rich men's dinners by way of pay-  
HUMOURISTS. ment for the claret and retainer for a  
further invitation.

Nor was he by any means a man of such commanding genius that he could dispense with labour ; though he had a certain amount of wit at will, a command of rather theatrical pathos, unlimited bustle and rattle, and sufficient familiarity with those whom the middle classes of his day called "high fellows" to dazzle the said middle classes with titles and scraps of "silver fork" detail. It is also probable that his manners are truer to those of his time than we, to whom this time is only a tradition, quite know. In the very greatest works the essentially and eternally human is so married to the ephemeral that it makes this eternal too, and we have no difficulty in appreciating it for all its deadness. But the smaller men cannot fix the manner of the minute in this way, and their presentations appear to us, not as interesting preservations and preparations, but as worn-out stuff which is not alive to us now, and the vitality of which at any time we feel more or less inclined to doubt. It has amused me sometimes in reading contemporary work of the kind to try and separate the pieces which will have the first, and those which have the second effect on readers a hundred years hence. To a certain extent it can, I think, be done, but probably never completely even by the wariest critic, by him who has paid

most attention to the abiding and the fleeting characteristics of literature respectively.

But this is a digression. In Hook, let THREE  
HUMOURISTS. me only repeat, much is dead that may have once been alive; a little was alive and is so still; but much also, I think, never was properly alive at all, and was only accepted as being so in the absence of livelier studies.

Those who, as is not uncommon, maintain that the preservative just referred to is more easily applied, or at any rate is more commonly found, in verse than in prose, may derive confirmation for their opinion from the different fate of the second author on our list. Barham and Hook were friends and contemporaries, and, but for the differences noted above in their characters and fortunes, might be said to resemble each other in many ways, if not in most. They died within a few years of each other, and at the time even of Barham's death there can be no question that his reputation was almost infinitesimal compared with Hook's. Yet the greater fame was doomed to decrease rapidly and continually, the smaller to increase at once and to hold its ground. I have been told indeed that *The Ingoldsby Legends* have shown of very late years a certain loss of grip on popular, at least on popular literary, estimation. They are not so often quoted; the young man of letters of the day does not appreciate, but rather disdains, them, and so forth. Even, however, if this were true (and I am rather doubtful of its

truth), even if we were to suppose that the very  
THREE amusing onslaught made upon the  
HUMOURISTS. *Legends* some ten or a dozen years  
ago by a person of the "æsthetic" persuasion (in  
very nearly the same terms as those which good  
Roger Ascham applied to the *Morte d'Arthur*),  
had some effect, it would remain certain that for  
at least an entire generation after their first col-  
lected appearance in 1840, and probably for  
an entire generation after their author's death  
in 1845, they enjoyed an almost unexampled  
and a certainly unexceeded popularity. They  
were reprinted again and again, in cheap editions  
and dear, with this man's illustrations and that  
man's, and without illustrations at all. They were  
the common delight of readers, and the common  
quoting ground of writers. Every schoolboy liter-  
ally knew them, and did not neglect them when  
he ceased to be a schoolboy; girls who were good  
for anything were nearly as fond of them as boys.  
For thirty years at least hardly anybody who  
attempted light verse failed to imitate them, and  
for at least the same number, if not a much larger  
one, nobody who read light verse with any relish  
failed to enjoy them.

How far did they deserve this really extra-  
ordinary vogue, which to some extent still con-  
tinues? The enemy, not merely in the person of  
the aforesaid "æsthetic" energumen, but long be-  
fore his time, has always accused them of being an  
ignoble caricature of a noble period of history, of



encouraging brutal and Philistine emotions, of being a hardly disguised and yet under-  
 hand and unworthy attack on the Ox-  
 ford Movement, of drawing their piquancy from the subtle pleasure which the baser side of human nature feels in seeing great and holy things degraded and burlesqued. Is there anything in this? I think there is something, nay, a great deal; but I should have to apply very uncomplimentary language to the quality of it. It is sometimes impertinent, and not often thoroughly to the point, to give personal impressions and opinions as an argument; but occasionally it is well in place. Now I happen (which for the present matter, if for that only, is of consequence) to be a thorough sympathiser with the Oxford Movement, and an impenitent, hardened, incurable lover of the Middle Ages. So long as, and to the extent to which, Newman was loyal to the Church of England, I should have followed him without the slightest hesitation; and I know no reading which for pure delight exceeds that of thirteenth century romances in twenty thousand lines of verse or prose. But I have never found *The Ingoldsby Legends* jar in the very slightest degree on these tastes and opinions of mine.

Considering indeed that the Middle Ages liked nothing better than burlesquing and rallying their own raptures, their own mysticism, their own religion, I really do not know why we should be more sensitive for them than they were for

themselves. There is a particular delight in making jests on one's own emotions and their objects, which only humourists, who are also lovers, know. As for the argument of brutality, for that there is absolutely no excuse. It requires very little discussion and no mercy. It is merely part of the rubbish talked and sometimes believed by the average fool of an age which turns up its eyes over England's part in the Napoleonic wars, swoons at the idea of a man drinking a bottle of port or a magnum of claret, and while crowding to see any stupid and tasteless feat of acrobatism which gives a chance of a fatal accident, goes into fits at the idea of a cock-fight, a prize-fight, or a badger-drawing.

In the mere character, however, of the subjects, except that their quaintness and variety have no small charm, very little of the attraction of *The Ingoldsby Legends* seems to me to reside. Although the grotesque-supernatural, and the tragi-comic suited Barham most admirably, and were perhaps his special walk, his powers were in reality of very wide application. *My Cousin Nicholas* is no contemptible attempt in the school of Hook. He is not much less good in prose than in verse, and he manages his alternations of grave and gay in verse itself with a skill which is hardly smaller in amount, though less delicate, than that of Praed, who probably gave him some lessons. His beautiful last lines "As I lay a-thinking" do not require the not very authentic antiquity of their spelling to give

them charm. He had scholarship, which, when it does not prevent a man from writing, THREE is seldom without effect on the quality HUMOURISTS. of what he writes ; he had the wide vague reading which scholarship nowadays too often excludes ; he had good humour, good feeling, good breeding, an immense sense of fun and an inexhaustible fund of rhymes and rhythms just suited for his purpose. There is a fairly considerable class of books and writers between which and whom a peculiar relation exists, the book seeming to have been made for the man and the man for the book ; and it need hardly be said that where it does exist the work is never valueless. In kind it may be high or low, an epic or an epigram, a romance or a riddle ; but it always has the merits of supremacy in that kind. And in the kind of burlesque poetical narrative I am quite sure that Thomas Ingoldsby never has had a superior, and I think it extremely improbable that he ever will have one.

In the case of a writer whose best things are universally known it is, fortunately, considering space, unnecessary to enter into even as much detail as is here unavoidable about one who is half forgotten like Hook, or one who has never been wholly known like Maginn. It would even be dangerous, for when one began there would be no stopping. I really think I could repeat half the *Legends* ; I am almost certain that I could with a cue here and there. And as no familiarity can



dull, so no want of acquaintance ought to be  
THREE proof against, the abundant and in-  
HUMOURISTS. tense characteristics of this jovial  
microcosm in verse. The hackneyed metaphors  
of a fountain and a kaleidoscope are the only  
ones that are equal to its curious combination of  
variety and formal perfection. The rhymes and  
the metres flicker and vary just as the water does  
when the winds blow its upthrown masses; they  
glitter and group themselves unerringly just as the  
colours and shapes do in the turning tube. How  
much of the charm may be due to the steady  
background of good sense, of right feeling, even of  
tenderness, which is spread behind these fantastic  
combinations, may be matter of opinion; how  
much to the unfailing sun of wit and humour that  
shines over the whole may be differently, though  
not very differently, estimated. But the total  
result can never fail of its effect except upon "bad  
prigs," upon persons of undue natural density, and  
upon those who, with amiable and estimable  
tastes as to what is in the fashion, are not capable  
of relishing what happens to be a little out of it.  
Few are the things that one can read at fourteen  
and at forty-eight with delight equal in intensity  
and not very much altered in character. But of  
these, in the case of "this Recensent" (and he  
thanks the Upper Powers for it), are *The Ingoldsby  
Legends*.

Yet I am not certain that of our three, the last  
is not in certain ways the greatest. The work of

Maginn, though easier to appreciate than it was a few years ago, is even yet hid as THREE  
a whole from the general cognisance. HUMOURISTS.  
I do not even know that it would be possible to recover it entirely; and I am quite sure that if it were so recovered it would suffer from the fatal drawback of being almost entirely Journalism, and of a consequent inequality all the greater that its author was the least gifted of all men with the senses of responsibility and hesitation. Barham, always in easy circumstances and restrained by his profession as well, wrote simply when it pleased him, and could hold back what he wrote till it pleased him. Even Hook had upon him the constraint of the book, slight as that was in his case. Maginn published little or nothing in book form. He was always a contributor or an editor, one who lived by contributions and editing; and he appears to have been as indifferent as Diderot himself to what became of his work after he had sent in the copy, and pocketed (a temporary process if ever there was one) the payment. Since the pious care of Mr R. W. Montagu collected in 1885 his *Miscellanies* in two volumes, it has been possible by adding the letterpress of the "Fraser Gallery" to them to obtain something like a conspectus of Maginn's extraordinary faculty. It is not a complete conspectus: and yet it is a conspectus which shows us the flaws in the work and makes us pretty certain that they would widen if the area of collection were extended.

It shows us, however, at the same time the  
THREE great and multifarious gifts of the man.  
HUMOURISTS. In one respect I own I am a heretic.  
I cannot away with Maginn's Homeric translations in ballad form. Mr Gladstone, I believe, thinks their tone Homeric; I should say it was as much like Homer, though in a different way, as Pope is. Mr Matthew Arnold thought them "genuine poems in their own way," and he called the *Lays of Ancient Rome* pinchbeck! Mr Conington complimented Maginn on having realised that Greek ballads can only be represented by English, and Mr Conington was an Oxford man, and must have learnt sound doctrine about *petitio principii*! However, no more of this. In the case of such as Maginn it is important not to blame the small fragment of his work which for some reason or other has been unduly praised, but to bring forward the far greater part of it which has never been praised enough. It is astonishing how various and how vivid the lights of that part are.

As for the letterpress of the "Fraser Gallery," I own that, clever as it is, I have no great affection for it. It is one of the earliest and one of the best examples of a kind of journalism for which there has since been greater and ever greater demand,—the brief biography, smart in style and somewhat swaggering in manner, of "Celebrities of the Day," "Men of the Time," and what not. Maginn knew a great deal: he was sufficiently on an intellectual



equality with most of his subjects for his treatment not to be merely impertinent ; and it is THREE certain that he had at this particular HUMOURISTS. time a coadjutor in Lockhart, whose knowledge and whose competency were even greater than his own, though Lockhart's actual literary faculty might not be quite so versatile. So the things are amusing enough and sometimes more than amusing ; also, which is not common in this kind of thing, they contain a rather unusual amount of positive biographical and miscellaneous information, not no doubt to be accepted quite unverified, but often extremely useful in the way of setting one on tracks. It is unlucky that in addition to their other faults they contain a great deal of the tedious and obsolete newspaper mannerism of the time, a mannerism of knowing and braggart assumption, which had been started in *Blackwood's Magazine*, which was to obtain for many years, and which is not quite dead yet. It must, I suppose have appealed to some taste, have hit some cranny of the human mind, but it certainly seems very unengaging to me.

This defect and others appear, but are less notable, in the miscellanies of all kinds which Mr Montagu has collected. In so far as there is any direct original for the tricks which Maginn began to play directly he became one of *Blackwood's* contributors, I am rather disposed to see it in the notes to *The Anti-Jacobin* and the combinations of fanciful divagation, scholarly parallel, and

scurrilous personal attack which distinguished that  
THREE celebrated periodical. Mr Montagu  
HUMOURISTS. (committing a crime too common,  
though always unforgivable in arrangers of selections and collections) omits to furnish the dates of the magazines from which he extracts, and to rout them out from complete sets of the originals requires time and opportunity. But the *Memoirs of Morgan O'Doherty*, from the allusions to *Peter's Letters* and other things, must have been very early. There are in them all the traits which Wilson subsequently elaborated and perfected in the *Noctes*,—the interspersions of verse, serious and comic, the studied desultoriness, the critical, social, and literary vagaries. Indeed there is no doubt that this famous series did owe its origin to Maginn, who disputes the honour of suggesting the motto.

The *Memoirs* themselves are filled with parodies and patter songs of singular liveliness, and characterised, as Maginn's writings generally are, by odd, but by no means unhappy lapses into the serious. They also show that wide familiarity with literature, especially with classical literature, by which the author was honourably distinguished. Since the comparative disuse of a classical education, these Greek and Latin freaks of Maginn's have probably become something of a stumbling-block to the generation which is now sent into the world unfurnished with the keys to some of the world's best things. Indeed in the not very

abundant comments made on Maginn's centenary, the British journalist not unfrequently THREE had the honesty to confess the fact. HUMOURISTS. But if the habit is thus to some a disqualification, it is, of course, to others an additional charm. And I do not know that any one has ever managed this particular style of academical wit better than Maginn. He may not have been an extremely profound or accurate scholar \* but few men have had more knowledge of the classics after the fashion which delighted Professor Blackie,—the knowledge which enables a man to talk and write in “the tongues” almost as freely as in his own language, and which leaves him rarely at fault for a quotation from or a quip in them. Yet few men could be more vernacular; and in these very *Memoirs* “The Powldoodies of Burran” exhibits a command of the style which Swift invented for the purpose of putting it into the mouth of Mrs Harris, unequalled since Swift's own examples.

O'Doherty (Maginn himself spells it in one word, “Odoherty”) also does duty as eidolon-author in another of “the Doctor's” most considerable productions, indeed his most considerable production taking length and merit together. The *Maxims of [Sir] Morgan O'Doherty* used to be procurable in a little pocket-volume which I have not seen for very many years. More

\* An Irish correspondent good-humouredly remonstrated with me on this admission. But the slip of “Nugæ Curialiæ” (v. *infra*) is not the only suspicious one to be found.



people probably know them from one or two  
THREE references of Thackeray's than in them-  
HUMOURISTS. selves, even since Mr Montagu's re-  
print; but they are very well worth knowing.  
With not a few of what seem now, and a few of  
what should surely have seemed at any time,  
breaches of good manners and good taste, they  
contain a great deal of wisdom on the first prin-  
ciples of literature, feeding, and philosophy, with  
a picture of Fourth-Georgian manners which, used  
with discretion, is instructive, and, used with or  
without discretion, entertaining. Maginn should  
not have spelt Château Grillet, Château *Grillé*,  
which is absurd; but it is greatly to his credit  
that he pronounced that too little known wine  
to be delicious. It shows that he had no vulgar  
taste.

His most serious and solid work in matter and  
manner, if not also in actual bulk, is the rather  
famous *Consideration of Farmer's Essay on the  
Learning of Shakespeare*. With some quite  
astonishing slips (such as "Nugæ Curialix," which  
perhaps is due to carelessness in correcting his  
proofs) it contains probably as much sound learn-  
ing, shrewd wit, and acute criticism as can be  
found in any single contribution to the enormous,  
and too often worthless library of Shakesperian  
comment.

His miscellaneous writings in verse and prose  
are too numerous to be considered here in detail.  
In both kinds there may be thought to be too

much of the aforesaid exercises in parody and burlesque criticism. *The Rime of the Ancient Waggonere*, *The Third Part of Christabel*, *Mooreish Melodies*, and so forth, though all very well in their own way and in small doses, are apt to become a little tiresome when collected in volumes. Nevertheless Maginn did some of his best work in these forms. *The Pewter Quart* is an admirable thing, the most spirited and genuine drinking-song perhaps of this century, if not the most poetical. Nor are the burlesque commentaries on *The Leather Bottell* and *The Black Jack* which follow by any means ungracious fooling, though they may be thought to have been carried on a little too long. There is great merit, both political and sentimental, in the variations which he founded on that most beautiful old song which begins "Let's drink and be merry." Some of his Latin versions in *The Embalmer* and elsewhere are excellent, and indeed it is difficult to dip anywhere into this class of his writing without finding pasture, though perhaps it is not wise to browse too long at one time thereon, and though not all the herbs are suited to all tastes. For instance I have never been able myself to take much delight in his exercises in jargon and thieves' Latin ; but they please others.

A gift which Maginn must have had in extraordinary measure, but which, for some reason or other, he seems to have left for the most part uncultivated, was his talent for prose fiction in

little. A long story I do not suppose he could  
THREE  
HUMOURISTS. ever have managed, and his longest  
known to me, *The Last Words of*  
*Charles Edwards*, is dreary enough. But the man  
who wrote three such masterpieces, by no means  
in the same kind, as *The Man in the Bell*, *Bob*  
*Burke's Duel with Ensign Brady*, and, best of all,  
*A Story without a Tail*, must have had it in him  
to write a great many more. There are many in-  
stances on record of men who have produced only  
one or two poems of value; very few I think of  
men who have produced one or two extraordinarily  
good prose-tales and no more. The sole explana-  
tion that occurs to me is that work of actual in-  
vention required a certain amount of planning and  
thinking, which Maginn's incurably reckless and  
random nature and habits refused to give. If it  
be so, the loss inflicted in this respect by his  
foibles is greater than any other. I have read *A*  
*Story without a Tail* literally scores of times and  
never without fresh enjoyment.

Indeed in "the chronicle of wasted time" (to  
play on words in his own manner) there are  
few more melancholy histories than Maginn's.  
Many of the greatest wits have had nothing like  
his learning; and hardly any man of very great  
learning has had anything like his wit; while it  
cannot be said that he wanted opportunity. Yet  
not only did he make a mess of his life, but he  
also, in a way which by no means necessarily  
follows, made a mess of his genius. It is hardly



possible to open a page of his without finding something that seems like indisputable THREE  
evidence of that quality ; yet in twenty HUMOURISTS.  
years of literary production he did no great thing, and not more than one or two small things that are perfect. Neither drink nor debts, neither want of method nor even want of industry, will fully account for this. And perhaps after all the truth is here, as in so many other cases, that Maginn did give the best that was in him to give, that his talents were more showy and versatile than solid, that the appearance in him was greater than the real capacity, and that in furnishing forth the part of a brilliant journalist and improvisatore he performed his day's work as it was appointed for him. I have never been able to make up my mind whether this theory is a consoling one or not, but it is of wide application and pretty strongly supported.

It is not, however, necessary to argue for or against it in this brief survey of an interesting group of humourists,—of “amusers,” as another language has it. With Hood, who surpassed them all in originality of wit and quality of poetry, and Praed, who in his smaller scale and sphere excelled them all in fineness of touch, they are perhaps the chief of all such as amused the town during the third and fourth decades of this century. Nothing that they did except *The Ingoldsby Legends* can be called individually important, and nothing with that exception is

destined, I should suppose, to a long lease of  
THREE life or a probable hope of resurrec-  
HUMOURISTS. tion. It is difficult to believe that  
Hook, at any rate in the bulk of his novels, can  
ever find many readers again, and the strongest  
of Maginn's claims, — the delusive and elusive  
air of genius frustrated which somehow clings  
to his work — is to be found chiefly in his  
mixture of classical learning and farcical humour,  
a mixture which I fear is less and less likely  
to be appreciated until the slow wheel of  
time has made a pretty long revolution. Ac-  
cording to not the wisest part of old-fashioned  
wisdom we ought perhaps to lament that they  
did not employ their wits on something more  
permanent, devote their energies to worthier  
occupations, and so forth. *Dignissimus* if not  
*gratissimus error!* With the rarest exceptions  
the plays and the poems, the sermons and the  
histories, which are not absolutely of the first  
class, die almost as fast as the novels and  
essays, the jokes and the journalism that de-  
serve the same classification. They preserve  
indeed a specious kind of apparent vitality in  
some respects, but it is little greater in the way  
of being actually read, while to the deliberate  
enquirer the sermon is sometimes even duller  
than the skit, the peroration less exciting than  
the parody.

Yet the division of literature to which they  
belong can never be indifferent to the lover of

literature both in itself and in its connection with humanity. Most of the work we have been surveying has

THREE  
HUMOURISTS.

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Sunk into the stream  
That whelms alike sage, saint, and martyr,  
And soldier sword and minstrel's theme,  
And Canning's wit and Gatton's charter.

More perhaps will undergo the same immersion ; till nothing but Ingoldsby remains above water, and even his head is vexed by the foam of the tides. But they were all very much alive once, which is more than can always be said of the sermons and the histories ; and where there has been life there must always be, in degrees varying from the infinite to the infinitesimal, interest for those who live.



## X.

### THE HISTORICAL NOVEL.

#### I.—THE DAYS OF IGNORANCE.

WHO wrote the first Historical Novel? The orthodox, and perhaps on the whole the sufficient, answer to this question is, Xenophon. And indeed the *Cyropædia* does in many ways answer to the description of a historical novel better than anything, at least anything extant, before it, and as well as most things for more than two thousand years after it. It is true that even nowadays hardly the most abandoned devotee of the instructive in novels, would begin a book with such a sentence as, "It occurred to us once upon a time how many democracies have come to an end at the hands of those who wished to have some kind of constitution other than a democracy." But perhaps that is only because we are profoundly immoral and sophisticated, while the Greeks were straightforward and sincere. For the very novelist who artfully begins with a scrap of dialogue, or a

description of somebody looking over a gate, or a pistol shot, or a sunset, or a tea-party, THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. will, before many pages are turned, plunge you fathoms deeper than ever classical plummet can have sounded in disquisition and dulness. Still, there is no doubt that not merely on this earliest, but on every early example of the kind, there weighed a certain character of amateurishness and novitiate. Not till within the present century in the hands of Miss Austen and Scott did prose fiction of any kind shake itself entirely free from the trammels of secondary purpose, without at the same time resigning itself to the mere concoction of amusing or exciting adventure. Even Fielding, though he would let nothing interfere with his story, thought it desirable to interlard and accompany that story with moral and philosophical disquisitions.

It is not therefore wonderful that Xenophon, who was quite a different person from Fielding, and was moreover simply exploring an untried way, should have subordinated his novel to his political purpose. In fact it is perhaps rather excessive to regard him as having intentionally written a novel, in our sense, at all. He wanted to write a political treatise: he was a pupil of Socrates; and vastly as the Socrates of Plato and the Socrates of Xenophon differ, they agree in exhibiting a strong predilection for the use of fictitious, or semi-fictitious literary machinery for the conveyance of philosophical truth. The *Cyro-*

*pædia* is in fact a sort of *Emile* of antiquity, devoted to the education of a king instead of a private person. It may even be argued that such romantic elements as it does contain (the character, or at least personage, of Panthea, the rivalry of Araspes and Abradatas, and so forth) are introduced less for any attraction they may give to the story than for the opportunities they afford to Cyrus of displaying the proper conduct of the ruler. And it is scarcely necessary to say that the actual historical element in the book is very small indeed, scarcely extending beyond the parentage, personality, and general circumstances of Cyrus.

Such as the book is, however, it is the nearest approach to the kind that we have from classical times. Some indeed would have it that Quintus Curtius has taken nearly as great liberties with the destroyer as Xenophon did with the founder of the Persian monarchy: but the things obviously belong to different kinds. The *Cyropædia* is a philosophical romance for which its author has chosen to borrow a historic name or two; the other (if indeed its author was a real classical writer and not a mere re-arranger of mediæval fable) is a history which admits unhistorical and romantic details. Nor can any of the extant Greek Romances, as they are generally called, be said to possess a historical complexion. They may sometimes, for the convenience of the authors, allude more or less slightly to historical facts; but



their general story and their characters have nothing to do with anything of the THE HISTOR- kind. The remarkable adventures of ICAL NOVEL. the conventional pair of lovers need no such admixture ; and Anthea, Chariclea, Leucippe, Chloe, and Hysmine are won and lost and won again without any but glances (if even that) at historical characters or incidents. Some things in Lucien's *True History* and other burlesques have led to the idea that the Historical Novel may have been more fully represented in works that have perished ; but there is little evidence of this.

It does not require very long or elaborate reflection to show that things could not well have been different. The attraction of historical subjects in fiction, for the writer to some extent and still more for the reader, depends entirely upon the existence of a considerable body of written history, and on the public acquaintance with it. Now although erudite enquiry has sufficiently shown that the ancients were by no means so badly off for books as it pleased Dr Johnson and others to assume, it is perfectly certain that they cannot possibly have had such a body of history. Except some scraps of chiefly Persian chronicle and a certain knowledge of affairs in Egypt, the Greeks had no history but their own, and this latter they were making and writing, not reading. They left the Romans a little more but not much. There was thus little for a Roman, and next to nothing for a Greek Scott or Dumas to go upon even had

he existed; no materials to work up, no public taste, imagination, or traditions to appeal to. Even if instincts and desires of the kind did suggest themselves to any one, the natural region in which it was sought to gratify them was mythology, not history, while the natural medium was verse, not prose. Apuleius, who worked up the legend of Cupid and Psyche so charmingly, might no doubt, if it had occurred to him, have done something of the same kind with Appius and Virginia, with the expulsion of the Pisistratidæ, with a hundred other Greek and Roman incidents of romantic capabilities. He would have had, too, the immense advantage of being (modern as he was in a way) on the right side of the gulf, of being, as our jargon has it, more or less "in touch" with his subjects, and of being free from the laborious and yet ineffectual gropings which have marred all post-mediæval attempts at the Historical Novel with a classical theme. But he did not; and if he did not there was certainly no one else who was likely to do it. The Historical Novel of Greece is as we have seen a philosophical treatise; the Historical Novel of Rome is an epic, an epic differing in merit as *Æneid* from *Thebaid* and *Thebaid* from *Bellum Punicum*, but still alike in being an epic, and not a novel.

When the kind revives after the deluge of the barbarians it shows us one of the most curious and interesting evidences of the strange fertilising

power of that deluge. The very identical separation which in some five centuries dis- THE HISTOR- solves and precipitates Latin into ICAL NOVEL. Romance, begets the romance itself at the same time. No doubt the new historical novels at first seem to be epics, like their predecessors, in so far as they had any. They are first in verse; but before very long they are in prose also. And what is more, one of the most essential and formative characteristics of the Historical Novel appears in them. The Virgils and their followers had gone a thousand years back for their subjects; even Silius Italicus had selected his at a prudent distance of hundreds. But the epics (before very long to become prose romances) of the Carolingian and Arthurian cycles attack comparatively recent times; and when the Crusades begin, by one of the most interesting things in literature, contemporary event actually transforms itself into romance. The story of fact seems to become alive, to twist itself out of the hands of the chronicler who has actually seen the fearsome host of the *Tafurs* before Antioch, and ridden "red-wetshod" into Jerusalem. Moreover it takes to itself all manner of strange legendary accretions, and becomes (as in *Les Chétifs* and other parts of the Crusading cycle) a historical novel, with some personages and incidents strictly matter-of-fact, and others purely and obviously fictitious.

There is no more difficult question than that of



deciding in exactly what manner these Romances  
THE HISTOR- were received by our forefathers. These  
ICAL NOVEL. forefathers were (a dim consciousness  
of it appears to be at last dawning on their  
descendants) not by any means fools; though  
the belief that they were so may still survive  
in company with the kindred beliefs that they  
never took baths, that they were extremely  
miserable, and so forth. They knew perfectly  
well that these things were, as they said them-  
selves, *trouvés*, invented, sometimes by the very  
person who sang or said them, always by some-  
body like him. At the same time they knew that  
there was a certain amount of historic truth about  
some of the personages. Probably (the gods not  
having made them critical about things where  
criticism could well be spared) they took in the  
thing pretty much the same delight that the  
modern reader takes in the mixture of truth and  
fiction which distinguishes the Historical Novel  
itself, and did not care to separate the constituents  
thereof.

It would take far too much space, and would  
be less strictly appropriate to a handling of the  
Historical Novel than to one of the Romance  
generally, to sort out in any detail the different  
kinds of mediæval story and their exact relation  
to our particular kind. And the investigation  
would be a little perplexed by the incurable  
mediæval habit of putting everything in verse,  
science as well as fiction, imagination as well as

history. Perhaps the nearest approach to the Historical Novel proper is to be found THE HISTOR-  
ICAL NOVEL. in the Icelandic Sagas, where the best authorities seem to agree that simple and sober family and provincial history is tricked out in the most inextricable and bewildering manner with sheer Scaldic invention. But the explanation is, as I have already hinted, that criticism was not born or reborn. Some, I believe, would be well pleased if it never had been; but that is neither here nor there. Has not Professor Flint, the most learned and painstaking of investigators, told us that he can find no trace of systematic historical criticism before Ibn Khaldun, that erudite Arab and contemporary of Chaucer? Now as without a considerable stock of history and some general knowledge of it there is no material for the Historical Novel, so without a more or less distinct criticism of history, of what pretty certainly has happened as distinguished from what very certainly has not, it is impossible for this kind of novel to attain a distinct and separate existence.

And you never (or at any rate very seldom) can put your finger on any part of any mediæval history, in prose or verse, whether it be avowedly chronicle or half-avowedly fiction, and say, "Here the man consciously and deliberately left his facts and took to his fictions." The difficulty, the impossibility, as it seems to me, of satisfactorily tracing the origins of the Arthurian story lies precisely in this. Your Nennius, your Caradoc

of Lancarvan even, very possibly, nay most probably, believed that they were giving simple history. Perhaps your Archdeacon Walter (always supposing that he ever existed) did the same. But what are we to make of Geoffrey of Monmouth and persons like him? Was Geoffrey a merely uncritical chronicler, taking details from record and romance alike? Was he, whether plagiarist in the main, or plastic artist in the main, a "maker," a conscious inventor? Or was he a historical novelist before his time, taking his facts from Nennius and Walter (if Walter there was), his inventions partly from Welsh and Breton poetry, partly from his own brains, and weaving it all into something like a whole? That is exactly what no one can say.

But I cling to my own contention that it is impossible to find out how much in the average mediæval writer was intended history, and how much deliberate romance, for the precise reason that he had never as a rule bent his mind to consider the difference between them. "The French book" said it, or the Latin book, or something, anything, else; and he took the saying, comparatively indifferent to its source, and handed it on a little increased, or at any rate not diminished, like the thrifty personage at the beginning of the *Republic*.

It will therefore be clear that, so long as this attitude of mind prevailed, no Historical Novel in the proper sense of the term was possible. History and Romance passed into each other with too



bewildering a metamorphosis ; what is pedantically called "the respect of the document" was THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. a thing absolutely unknown. In the days when the Homeric tale of Troy expanded itself through Dictys and Dares, through Benoit de Sainte-More and Guido Colonna, into endless amplifications ; when the already rather romantic Alexander of Curtius (always supposing the order not to be the reverse one) acquired twelve Paladins, and discovered the Fountain of Youth, and all but achieved the Earthly Paradise ; when the merely poetical history of the *Chanson d'Antioche* branched off into the sheer legend of *Les Chétifs* and the endless imaginations of the *Chevalier au Cygne*, there could be no special Historical Novel because everything was at once novel and history. The peculiarities of romantic handling had become ingrained in, were as it were inextricably blended with and joined to, the literary forms in common use. Not merely a superhuman genius like Dante, when he throws contemporary event and feeling into a form which seems to belong to all time or none, but lesser and more strictly practical persons like Froissart and Guillaume de Machault, when the one tells the contemporary prowess of the English in France in brilliant prose, and the other sings the contemporary exploits of Peter of Lusignan at Alexandria in not very ornate verse, share in the benefits or the drawbacks of this romantic atmosphere. Without any scuffling they change rapiers ; and you cannot tell which is which.

A kind which the restless ingenuity and fertile invention of the Middle Ages had not discovered was very unlikely to find existence in the dulness of the fifteenth century. That age, so far as intellectual work is concerned, was occupied either in tedious imitation of the products of mediæval genius, or in laborious exhumation of the products of the genius of the ancients. To history proper it did not pay very much attention, and its chief achievement in fiction, the *Amadis* cycle, is mainly remarkable for the way in which it cuts itself altogether adrift from history. The older romances, in conformity with the stock tag of one of their writers about "the sayings and the doings and the ways of the ancestors" tried to bring themselves from time to time into a sort of contact with those central and accepted points of older romance which were almost history. But Lobeira, or Montalvo, or whoever he was, with his or their followers, hardly do this at all. Their world of fantasy suffices them. And perhaps, if anybody likes critical paradox, they may be said to have in a way accelerated the real Historical Novel by rejecting, half unconsciously no doubt, the admixture of novel and history in the undistinguished and indistinguishable fashion of the Middle Ages.

The sixteenth century was too busy with the actual, and (in that which was not actual) with its marvellous outburst of poetry and drama, with its passionate devotion to religious, political, philo-

sophical and other learning to pay much attention to the comparatively frivolous department of prose fiction. Even if it had done so, the old constraints and disabilities waited on it still. It was, however, getting rid of them pretty rapidly. It was accumulating a great mass of historical information which the Press was spreading and making generally accessible; it was gradually forging and exercising itself with the weapons of criticism; and side by side with this exercise, it was developing the natural corrective and supplement—an intelligent and affectionate retrospect of the past from the literary point of view. This last is a thing of which we find little trace either in classical or in mediæval times: the most obvious ancient indications of it are to be found in Alexandria, that curious microcosm of the modern world, and especially in the writings of the Hellenistic Jews. But it begins to appear or reappear in the sixteenth century, and with it comes the promise of the Historical Novel.

The promise, but not the performance. Among the scanty fiction of the sixteenth century the work of Rabelais and Cervantes (for though *Don Quixote* did not appear till a year or two after the century had arithmetically closed, it belongs thereto) towers with a supremacy not merely born of the want of rivals. But each is (so far as class goes) only a parody of the older, and especially of the Amadis, romances. The philosophical fictions,



whether they be political like *Utopia* or social and educational like *Euphues*, are equally far from our subject, and obviously do but copy the forms of Plato and Xenophon. Nearly all the rest is but tale-telling, with an imitation of the Greek pastoral here and there, blended with other kinds, as in *Arcadia* and *Astræa* and *Diana*.

The immediate descendants of these latter did indeed in the next age attempt to give themselves historical form, or at any rate historical names; and the names if not the form prevailed for a considerable period. Indeed, *Le Grand Cyrus* and *Cléopâtre* and *Clélie*, if we take their glances at the present, as well as their nominal references to the past, are doubly historical; and this double appeal continued in the ordinary French novel for a long time. Thus the characters of the famous *Princesse de Clèves* (the first modern novel as some will have it to be) were all real persons, or most of them, once upon a time, besides possessing real doubles in the court of Louis the Fourteenth. But it was in the latter, not in the former bearing of them that their original readers took interest, while the writers here and elsewhere cared not in the very least for any historical verisimilitude whatever. And this continued to be the case throughout the eighteenth century. The Novel of Sensibility, either out of mere habit or for some other reason, was rather fond of taking historical names and even in a very broad and general way historical

incidents to help it; but nothing could be less like a Historical Novel.

THE HISTORICAL NOVEL.

In England, as is very well known, the seventeenth century gave us, properly speaking, neither novel nor romance of the slightest importance. It allegorised; and on one occasion its allegory shot up into the mighty creation of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It pursued its explorations in fictitious political geography from *Utopia* to *Atlantis* and from *Atlantis* to *Oceana*. It told a story or so as the humour took it. But it was not till the next century that the country which has since been the school of every kind of novel to every other country in Europe, and has in the past hundred and fifty years probably produced more novels than all the countries of Europe put together, began seriously to devote itself to the kind. And even then it did not for a long time discover the real Historical Novel. Defoe, indeed hovered around and about this kind as he did around and about so many others. The *Memoirs of a Cavalier* is a Historical Novel almost full-fledged, and wanting only a stronger dramatic and personal element in it. That unequal and puzzling book *Roxana* is almost another: and if the *Memoirs of Captain Carleton* are fiction, they may perhaps take rank with these, though at a greater distance. But either Defoe's own incurable tendencies to mystification, or the appetites of the time, seem to have imposed upon him the need of pretending that everything which

he wrote was true. Nor did he ever attain to THE HISTOR- that important variety of the novelist's  
ICAL NOVEL. art which consists in detaching and isolating the minor characters of his book,—an art which is nowhere of more consequence than in the Historical Novel. If Roxana's Amy, and William the Quaker in *Captain Singleton* stand out among his characters, it is because by art or accident he has been able to impart more of this detachment and individuality to them than to almost any others. And as we shall see when we come presently to consider what the Historical Novel ought to be, there is hardly any qualification so necessary to it as this.

But Defoe, as is well known, exercised little direct influence on English literature, for all his genius, his immense industry, and the multifarious ways in which he was a precursor and innovator. He was read, rather than imitated or critically admired; and even if his influence had been more direct, another current would have probably been strong enough to drive back or absorb the waves of his for a time. Le Sage with *Gil Blas* taking up and enforcing the previous popularity of *Don Quixote*; Marivaux with his lessons to Richardson; and the strong satiric allegory of Swift, slightly sweetened and humanised but not much weakened by Fielding, still held the Historical Novel aloof, still kept it "a bodiless childful of life in the gloom." And part of the cause was still, unless I greatly mistake, that which has been already



assigned, the absence of a distinct, full, and tolerably critical notion of history such as THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. the eighteenth century itself was hard at work supplying.

Nor was the mere accumulation of historical facts, or the mere diffusion of knowledge of them, the only work of preparation for this special purpose in which the century was engaged ; though it was the greatest. Few people, I think, quite realise how little history was read and known in England before the middle of the last century. It was then that Johnson could mention Knollys (a very good and interesting writer no doubt, but already antiquated and certainly not of the first class) as our best if not our only historian on the great scale. And it was only then that Hume and Robertson and Gibbon by ushering the Historic Muse in full dress into libraries, and Goldsmith by presenting her in rather careless but very agreeable undress in schoolrooms, were at once taking away this reproach and spreading the knowledge of the subject ; in other words were providing the historical novel-writer with material, and furnishing the historical novel-reader with the appetite and the modicum of knowledge necessary for their enjoyment. Yet it may be doubted whether this would have sufficed alone, or without that special additional stimulus which was given by what is vaguely called the Romantic movement. When in their very different ways Percy and Walpole and Gray, with many others, directed or excited public

curiosity about the incidents, the manners, and the literature of former times, they made the Historical Novel inevitable; and indeed it began to show itself with very little delay.

Want of practice, want of the aforesaid historical knowledge, and perhaps, above all, want of a genius who chose to devote himself to the special subject, made the earliest babblings of the style very childish babblings indeed. *The Castle of Otranto* itself is in essence a Historical Novel with the history omitted; and a good many of its imitators endeavoured to supply the want. For a time they did it with astonishing clumsiness and want of the historic sense. Even Godwin, a historian by profession and a man of really very considerable historical knowledge, appears to have had not the remotest notion of local colour, of antiquarian fitness, of the adjustment of atmosphere and style. *St Leon*, for instance, is in its opening scenes to no small extent historical, and keeps up the historic connection to some degree throughout; but, except for a few bare facts, the whole thing is a gross anachronism, only to be excused on the inadequate-ground that in "a romance of immortality" you cannot expect much attention to miserable concerns of time. There is not the least attempt to adjust the manners to those of Francis the First's day, or the dialogue and general incidents to anything known of the sixteenth century.

The age still told its novels, as it mounted its plays, with a bland and complete disregard of details such as these. THE HISTORICAL NOVEL.

And Godwin was a purist and a pedant in these respects as compared with the great Anne Radcliffe. The rare lapse into older carelessness which made the sun set in the sea on the east coast of Scotland in *The Antiquary* is a peccadillo not to be named beside the astounding geography of the *Mysteries of Udolpho*, or the wonderful glimpses of a France such as the gifted lady imagined it to have been in the time of the religious wars. Clara Reeve, the author of the once famous *Old English Baron*, writing years before either Godwin or Mrs Radcliffe, and on the direct and acknowledged model of Walpole, threw the lessons of her master (who really did know something both about mediæval history and manners,) entirely to the winds; and though she took Henry the Sixth's youth and the regency of Bedford for her time, made her picture one of no time at all. Her French contemporaries were doing just the same or worse; and all over Europe the return to the Middle Ages was being made to a Middle Age entirely, or almost entirely of convention. Miss Reeve herself found not a few imitators who were more boldly but not more wisely historical than herself. In the ninth decade of the eighteenth century when Scott was a boy of twelve or fourteen, Miss Lee had produced her egregious *Recess*, dealing with Elizabethan times and Elizabeth herself. Many others



followed, and the not entirely forgotten novels of Jane Porter, though they will be noticed later, actually preceded Scott.

If we could attach quite as much importance to Scott's intromissions with *Queenhoo Hall* (1808) as he himself seems to do in regard to the genesis of *Waverley*, the performances of the Reeves and the Radcliffes might be credited with a very large share in determining the birth, at last, of the genuine Historical Novel proper. For there can be no doubt that it was because he was shocked at the liberties taken and the ignorance shown in these works, that that eminent and excellent antiquary, Mr Joseph Strutt, determined to show the public how their ancestors really did live and move and have their being, in the romance of *Queenhoo Hall*. I am ashamed to say that my knowledge of that work is entirely confined to Scott's own fragment, for the book is a very rare one; at least I hardly ever remember having seen a copy catalogued. But the account of it which Scott himself gives, and the fragment which he seems to have very dutifully copied in manner from the original, are just what we should expect. Strutt—probably caring nothing for a story as a story and certainly being unable to write one—busied himself only about making his language and his properties and his general arrangement as archaically correct as possible. His book therefore naturally bore the same resemblance to a Historical Novel that Mr Oldbuck's *Cale-*

*doniad*, could he ever have got it done according to his own notions and without Lovel's assistance, would have borne to an epic poem. THE HISTORICAL NOVEL.

And now, as we have brought the Historical Novel safely through that period of ante-natal history which some great authorities have thought the most important of all, as we have finished the account of the Days of Ignorance (to adopt the picturesque and pleasing Arab expression for the period of Arabian annals before Mahomet), it would be obviously improper to bring in the Prophet himself at the end of even a short preliminary enquiry. And there is all the more reason for not doing so because this is the place in which to consider what the Historical Novel is. It will not do to adopt the system of the bold empiric and say, "the Novel as written by Scott." For some of the best of Scott's novels (including *Guy Mannering* and *The Antiquary*) are not historical novels at all. Yet it may be confessed that Scott left but little in a general way to be found out about the style, and that his practice, according as it is less or more successful, may almost be translated into the principles of the art.

We have already seen something of what a Historical Novel ought not to be and is not; while the eighty years which have passed since the publication of *Waverley*, if they have not shown us all possible forms of what it ought to

be and is, have probably gone very far to do so. THE HISTOR- For the possibilities of art, though quite  
ICAL NOVEL. infinite in the way of detail, by no means include very many new things in their general outlines ; and when an apparently new leaf is turned, the lines on that leaf are apt to be filled in pretty quickly. Periclean and Elizabethan drama each showed all it could do in less than the compass of a lifetime, though no doubt good examples were produced over a much longer period than this. And though I hope that good historical novels will be written for hundreds of years to come, I do not think that they will be written on any very different principles than those which showed themselves in the novels produced during the forty years which passed between the appearance of *Waverley* and the appearance of *Westward Ho !*

We have seen how the advent of the Historical Novel was delayed by the want of a general knowledge of history, and we have seen how in that fate of *Queenhoo Hall*, whereof Scott himself is the chronicler, the opposite danger appeared when the first had been removed. The danger of too much history lay not merely in the way of too much pedantry like that of the good Strutt, but in that of an encroachment of the historic on the romantic element in divers ways. This, if not so destructive of the very existence of the thing as the other danger, is the more fatal of the two to its goodness when it does exist.

The commonest and most obvious form of this



error is decanting too much of your history bodily into your novel. Scott never falls into THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. this error; it is much if he once or twice approaches it very far off. But Dumas, in the days when he let "the young men" do the work with too little revision or warning, was prone to it; G. P. R. James often fell into it; and Harrison Ainsworth, in those painful later years when his dotages fell into the reluctant hands of critics who had rejoiced in him earlier as readers, was simply steeped in it. It made not merely the besetting sin, but what may be called the regular practice (unconscious of sin at all) of writers like Southey's friend, Mrs Bray; and the unwary beginner has not shaken himself or herself free from it even now.

This, however, is so gross and palpable a fault that one could but wonder at its deceiving persons of ability and literary virtue, if the temptations to it were not equally palpable and gross. A much subtler, though perhaps an even worse mistake, comes next, and ruins books that might have been good and very good to this day, though Scott himself, besides the warning of his practice, marked it "dangerous" in more than one place of his critical introductions, and though all the better critics from Joubert and Sainte-Beuve downwards have blown their foghorns and rocked their bell-buoys for its avoidance. This is the allotting too prominent a position and too dominant an interest to the real persons and the real incidents of the

story. It is, I suppose, in vain to repeat the THE HISTOR- aforesaid warnings. Within the last ICAL NOVEL. two or three years I can remember two books—both written with extreme care by persons of no ordinary talent, and one of them at least introducing personages and a story of the most poignant interest—which were failures because the historical attraction was not relegated to the second place. If Scott himself had made Mary the actual heroine of *The Abbot*, had raised George Douglas to the position of hero, and had made their loves (practically fictitious as they would have been) the central point of the story, I do not doubt that he would have failed. If it be urged, that he has made Richard almost the avowed hero of *The Talisman* and not much less than the hero of *Ivanhoe*, the answer is clear: that the story is in the one case almost entirely, in the other everywhere, save in a very few points, removed from actual history, and that while we gain the popular interest in the Lion-Heart as a stimulus, we are not in reality balked and hampered by the too narrow room, the too inelastic circumstances, which historic fact supplies. I have always thought it a proof of the unerring tact which guided Sir Walter in general on this matter that he never once, save in the case of *Rob Roy* (and there the reality was but a little one), took his title from a real person, and only twice in the suggestive, but not hampering instances of *Kenilworth* and *Woodstock*, from a real

place. For *The Legend of Montrose* and *The Fair Maid of Perth* contain obvious fiction THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. as their main appeal. His successors were less wise; and they paid for their want of wisdom.

The canons negative and affirmative will then run somewhat thus: "Observe local colour and historical propriety, but do not become a slave either to Dryasdust or to Heavysterne. Intermix historic interest and the charm of well-known figures, but do not incur the danger of mere historical transcription; still more take care that the prevailing ideas of your characters, or your scene, or your action, or all three, be fantastic and within your own discretion." When these are put together we shall have what is vernacularly called "the bones" of the Historical Novel. Hereafter we may go on to see what flesh has been imposed on this skeleton by nearly three generations of practitioners. For the present it may suffice to add that the Historical Novel — like all other novels without exception, if it is to be good — must not have a direct purpose of any sort, though no doubt it may, and even generally does, enforce certain morals both historical and ethical. It is, fortunately, by its very form and postulates, freed from the danger of meddling with contemporary problems; it is grandly and artistically unactual, though here again it may teach unobtrusive lessons. Although, oddly enough, those imperfect French examples of it to which we have referred incline



more to the novel than to the romance, and busy themselves with a kind of analysis, it is of course in its nature synthetic and not analytic. It is not in the least limited by considerations of time or country; it is as much at home on a Mexican teocalli as in an English castle, though it certainly has, hitherto, exhibited the odd peculiarity that no one has written a first-rate historical novel of classical times. While enquiry and research maim the chances of art in many, perhaps in most directions, they only multiply and enlarge the fields for this. In the drudgeries of the very dullest dog that ever edited a document there may be the germ of a *Quentin Durward*; and in itself this novel is perhaps the most purely refreshing of all reading, precisely because of its curious conjunction of romance and reality.

## XI.

### THE HISTORICAL NOVEL.

#### II.—SCOTT AND DUMAS.

I DO not think that observation, however widely she may extend and however narrowly THE HISTOR- she may concentrate her view, will find ICAL NOVEL. in the history of literature anything quite similar to the achievement of the Waverley Novels. Their uniqueness does not consist wholly, or from the present point of view even mainly, in the fact that for bulk, excellence, and rapidity of production combined they can probably challenge anything else in letters. That they can do this I am by no means disposed to deny. But the point of pre-eminence at present to be considered is the singular and miraculous fashion in which Sir Walter, taking a kind of writing which had, as we have seen, been tried, or at least tried *at*, for more than two thousand years, and which had never yet been got to run smoothly on its own lines to its own end, by one stroke effected what the efforts of those two millenniums had been bungling and baulking themselves over.

That *Waverley* itself is the ideal of an historical  
THE HISTOR- novel need not be contended ; and I do  
ICAL NOVEL. not know that any intelligent devotee  
would contend for anything of the kind. It  
bears, especially in its earlier chapters, too many  
marks of the old false procedure ; and that  
insipidity of the nominal hero, which is so con-  
stantly and not so unjustly charged against Scott,  
appears in it pretty strongly. His unworldly  
education and the flustering influence of the  
Blessed Bear do not wholly excuse *Waverley*  
even in so early a matter as the Balmawhapple  
Duel. We can hardly blame his brother officers  
for suspecting him of poltroonery ; and he can  
only clear himself from the charge of being a  
coward by submitting to that of being a simpleton.  
And though it is by no means the case that,  
according to the stupid old rule of critics like  
Rymer, a hero must be always wise as well as  
always fortunate, always virtuous as well as always  
brave, yet the kinds of folly permitted to him are  
rather limited in number. It is worth while to  
dwell on this in order to show that what is most  
wonderful about *Waverley* is not its individual  
perfection as a work of art ; though the Baron, the  
Bailie, the whole of the actual scenes after the war  
breaks out, and many other things and persons,  
exalt it infinitely above anything of the kind  
known earlier.

But the chief marvel, the real point of interest,  
is the way in which, after thousands of years of



effort to launch one particular ship into one particular ocean, she at last slips as THE HISTOR-  
ICAL NOVEL. by actual miracle into the waves and sweeps out into the open sea. Exactly how this came about it may be impossible to point out with any exhaustive certainty. Some reasons why the thing had not been done before were given in the last paper; some why it was done at this hour and by this man may perhaps be given in the present. But we shall have to end by assigning at least a large share of the explanation to the formula that "Walter Scott made historical novels because there was in him the virtue of the historical novelist."

Nevertheless we can perhaps find out a little about the component parts of this virtue, a little more about the antecedents and immediate workings of it. The desiderata which have been referred to before—the wide knowledge of history, the affectionate and romantic interest in the past—Scott possessed in common with his generation, but in very much larger measure and more intense degree than most of its members. Nor was it probably of slight importance that when he commenced historical novelist he was a man well advanced in middle age, and not merely provided with immense stores of reading, and with very considerable practice in composition of many kinds, but also experienced in more than one walk of practical business, thoroughly versed in society from the highest to the lowest ranks, and lastly,

which is a matter of great importance in all cases, THE HISTOR- master of a large portion of his own  
ICAL NOVEL. time. It had indeed for years pleased him—as it did afterwards, fortunately or unfortunately, to a still greater extent,—to dispose of much of this leisure in literary labour; but it was in labour of his own choosing, and neither in task-work nor in work necessary for bread-winning. The Sherifffdom and the Clerkship (least distressful of places) freed him from all cares of this kind, augmented as his revenues were by the extraordinary sums paid for his poems.

But the most happy predisposition or preparation to be found in his earlier career was beyond all doubt his apprenticeship, if the word seem not too unceremonious, to these poems themselves. Here indeed he had far less to originate than in the novels. From the dawn of literature the narrative romance had been written in verse, and from the dawn of literature it had been wont at least to give itself out as historical. I am not sure, however, that the present age, which, while it gives itself airs of being unjust to Scott's prose, is unjust in reality to his poetry, does not even here omit to recognise the full value of his innovations or improvements. Of most classical narrative poems (the *Odyssey* being perhaps the sole exception) the famous saying about Richardson, that if you read for the story you would hang yourself, is true enough. It is true to a great extent of Milton, to some extent even of Spenser, and of

nearly all the great narrative poets of the Continent, except Ariosto, in whom it is THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. rather the stories than the story, rather the endless flow of romantic and comic digression than the plot and characters, that attract us. As for the mediæval writers whom Scott more immediately followed, I believe I am in a considerable minority. I find them interesting for the story; but most people do not find them so, and I cannot but admit myself that their interest of this kind varies very much indeed, and is very seldom of the highest.

With Scott it is quite different. Any child who is good for anything knows why *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* was so popular. It was not merely or mainly because the form was novel and daring; for nearly a hundred years past that form has been as familiar as Pope's couplet was to our great-grandfathers. It was not merely (though it was partly) because the thing is interspersed with passages of delightful and undoubted poetry. It was because it was and is interesting as a story; because the reader wanted to know what became of Deloraine and the Goblin page, and the rest; because the incidents and the scenes attracted, excited, fixed attention. This was even more the case in *Marmion* (which moreover approaches the historical novel in verse more nearly still), and it never failed in any of the rest. It was, to take some of the least popular of all the poems, because Scott could tell an incident as he has told the ven-



geance of Bertram Risingham in *Rokeby*, because  
THE HISTOR- he could knit together the well-worn  
ICAL NOVEL. and world-old string of familiar trials  
and temptations as he has done in *The Bridal of  
Triermain*, that he made his fortune in verse. He  
had the secret of tale-telling and of adjusting tales  
to facts. He taught it to Byron and others, and  
he made the popularity of the thing.

The suitability of verse, however, for the story  
as the story, and especially for the historical novel  
as the historical novel, is so far inferior to that of  
prose, and the difficulty of keeping up a series of  
fictions in verse is so immeasurably greater than  
that of doing the same thing in prose, that I am  
disposed to believe that *Waverley* would have  
appeared all the same if there had been no Byron,  
and no chance of dethronement. In fact, the  
historical novel had to be created, and Scott had  
to create it. He had learned—if so dull and  
deliberate a process as learning can be asserted of  
what seems to have been as natural and as little  
troublesome to him as breathing—to build the  
romantic structure, to decorate it with ornament  
of fact and fancy from the records of the past, to  
depict scenery and manners, to project character,  
even to some extent to weave dialogue. And I  
do not know that there is any more remarkable  
proof of his literary versatility in general, and his  
vocation for the historical novel in particular, than  
the fact that the very fault of prose romances,  
especially those immediately preceding his own,

was also one most likely to be encouraged by a course of poetical practice, and yet is THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. one from which he is almost entirely free.

The Godwins and the Mrs Radcliffes had perpetually offended, now by dialogue so glaringly modern that it was utterly out of keeping with their story and their characters, now by the adoption of the conventional stage jargon which is one of the most detestable lingos ever devised by man. With very rare exceptions Sir Walter completely avoids both these dangers. His conversation has not, indeed, that prominence in the method of his work which we shall find it possessing in the case of his great French follower. But it is for the most part full of dramatic suitableness, it is often excellently humorous or pathetic, and it almost always possesses in some degree the Shakespearean quality of fitting the individual and the time and the circumstances without any deliberate archaism or modernism. No doubt Scott's wide reading enabled him to do a certain amount of mosaic work in this kind. Few for instance, except those whose own reading is pretty wide in the plays and pamphlets of the seventeenth century, know how much is worked from them into *The Fortunes of Nigel* and *Woodstock*. But this dialogue is never mere mosaic. It has the quality which, already called Shakespearean, also belongs to men of such different kinds and orders of greatness from Scott's or Shakespeare's as, for instance, Goldsmith—the quality of humanity, independent of time.

Now this is of itself of such importance to  
THE HISTOR- the historical novelist, that it may be  
ICAL NOVEL. doubted whether any other kind of  
craftsman can find it more important. The  
laborious and uninspired attempt at fidelity to  
“*temp.* of tale” in language, is nearly as destruc-  
tive of the equanimity proper to the reception  
of a novel, as is the perpetual irritation which  
glaring and tasteless anachronisms of speech ex-  
cite. And it is not particularly easy to say  
whether this knack plays a greater part in the  
fashioning of the “Scotch novel,” (as it used to be  
called, with an odd mixture of propriety and im-  
propriety), than the other ingredients of plot,  
character, and description. In regard to plot,  
Scott was from one point of view a great and con-  
fessing sinner; from another, a most admirably  
justified one. Plot, in the strict sense, he never  
achieved, and very seldom even attempted to  
achieve it. It was only the other day that there  
was published for the first time a letter from his  
intimate friend and one of his best critics, Lady  
Louisa Stuart (who, to be sure, had literature in  
the blood of her), stigmatising, more happily per-  
haps than has ever been done since, Sir Walter’s  
habit of “huddling up the cards and throwing them  
into the bag in his impatience for a new deal.” It  
may almost be said that Scott never winds up a plot  
artfully; and the censure which he makes Captain  
Clutterbuck pass in the introduction to *The For-  
tunes of Nigel* is undoubtedly valid. When Peacock,



in *Crotchet Castle*, made that very crotchety comparison of Scott to a pantomine librettist, he might at least have justified it by the extraordinary fondness of the novelist for a sort of transformation-scene which finishes everything off in a trice, and, as Dryden says of his hasty preacher,

Runs huddling to the benediction.

The powerful and pathetic scenes at Carlisle and the delightful restoration of the Baron somewhat mask, in *Waverley* itself, the extreme and rather improbable ease with which the hero's pardon is extorted from a government and a general rather prone to deal harshly than mildly with technical traitors. I never could make out how, if Sir Arthur Wardour's fortune was half so badly dipped as we are given to understand, his son, even with more assistance from Lovel than a young man of spirit was likely to accept from his sister's suitor, could have disengaged it at the end of *The Antiquary*. It is true that this is the least historical of all the novels, but the procedure is the same. Diana and her father were most theatrically lucky, and Clerk Jobson, and even Rashleigh, scoundrels as both were, were astonishingly unlucky, at the close of *Rob Roy*; and it is especially difficult to understand why the attorney was struck off the rolls for joining in the attempt to secure an attainted person who subsequently got off by killing the officers of the law in the

execution of their duty. One might go on with this sort of peddling criticism right through the series, winding up with that catastrophe of *Woodstock* where Cromwell's mercy is even more out of character and more unlikely than Cumberland's. Nor are these conclusions the only point of the novels, as usually constructed, where a stop-watch critic may blaspheme without the possibility of at least technical refutation of his blasphemies. Scott has a habit (due no doubt in part to his rapid and hazardous composition) of introducing certain characters and describing certain incidents with a pomp and prodigality of detail quite out of proportion to their real importance in the story. And even a person who would no more hesitate to speak disrespectfully of the *Unities* than of the *Equator* may admit that such an arrangement as that in *Rob Roy*, where something like a quarter of the book is taken up with the adventures of four-and-twenty hours, is not wholly artistic.

Yet for my part I hold that the defence made by the shadowy Author of *Waverley* in the Introduction aforesaid is a perfectly sound one, and that it applies with special propriety to the historical division of the novels, and with them to historical novels generally. The Captain's gibe, conveyed in an anecdote of "his excellent grandmother," shows that Scott (as he was far too shrewd not to do) saw the weak points as well as the strong of this defence. Indeed I am not sure

that he quite saw the strength of the strongest of all. It was all very well to plead that THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. he was only "trying to write with sense and spirit a few scenes unlaboured and loosely put together, but which had sufficient interest in them to amuse in one corner the pain of body; in another to relieve anxiety of mind; in a third place to unwrinkle a brow bent with the furrows of daily toil; in another to fill the place of bad thoughts and suggest better; in yet another to induce an idler to study the history of his country; in all, save where the perusal interrupted the discharge of serious duties, to furnish harmless amusement." But the Captain might, if he had ventured to take such a liberty with the author of his being, have answered: "But, sir, could not you amuse and relieve and unwrinkle and fill and induce and furnish, and all the rest on't, at the same time joining your flats a little more carefully?"

The Eidolon with the blotted revise would have done better, argumentatively speaking, to have stuck to his earlier plea, that, following Smollett and Le Sage, he tried to write rather a "history of the miscellaneous adventures which befall an individual in the course of life, than the plot of a regular and concerted *epopoeia*, where every step brings us nearer to the final catastrophe." For it so happens that this plea is much nearer to the special business and ends of the historical novelist than to those of the avowedly inventive writer. As a matter of fact, we do know that Smollett



certainly, and suspect that Le Sage probably, wove a  
THE HISTOR- great deal of actual experience into their  
ICAL NOVEL. stories ; while Fielding, who is in the  
passage cited contrasted with them, seems never  
to have incorporated incidents, and at most a few  
characters, such as those of his wife, Allen, and one  
or two more whom he drew mainly in outline. A  
man who thus keeps clear of the servitude of actual  
occurrence, communicating reality by the results  
of his observation of human nature and human  
life generally, can shape the ends of his story as  
well as rough-hew them. But the man who makes  
incident and adventure his first object, and in  
some cases at least draws them from actual re-  
cords, is bound to allow himself a licence much  
greater than epic strictness permits. That truth  
is stranger than fiction is only the copybook form  
of a reflection which a hundred critics have made  
and enforced in different ways since a thousand  
writers put the occasion before them—to wit, that  
in real life things happen in a more remiss and  
disorderly fashion than is allowable in fiction.

This point is indeed put very well by Scott  
himself in the introduction to *The Abbot*: “For  
whatever praise may be due to the ingenuity which  
brings to a general combination all the loose  
threads of a narrative, like the knitter at the  
finishing of her stocking, I am greatly deceived  
if in many cases a superior advantage is not  
attained by the air of reality which the deficiency  
of explanation attaches to a work written on a

different system. In life itself many things befall every mortal of which the individual THE HISTOR- never knows the real cause or origin; ICAL NOVEL. and were we to point out the most marked distinction between a real and a fictitious narrative, we would say that the former in reference to the remote causes of the events it relates is obscure, doubtful, and mysterious, whereas in the latter case it is a part of the author's duty to afford satisfactory details upon the causes of the events he has recorded, and, in a word, to account for everything."

The historical novel, however, escapes this stricture in part because there the irregularities, the unexpectednesses, the disproportions of action, are things accepted and not to be argued about. Certain well-attested points and contrasts in the character and conduct of Marlborough and of Catherine the Second might be justly objected to as unnatural in fiction: such historical incidents as Clive's defence of Arcot, or as the last fight of the *Revenge*, would at least be frowned or smiled at as if they were mere inventions. Dealing as the historical novelist must with actual and authenticated things like these, and moulding, as he will if he is a deacon in his craft, his fictitious incidents on their pattern, and to suit them, he can take to himself all the irregularity, all the improbability, all the outrages on the exact scale of Bossu, in which life habitually indulges. And he is not obliged,—he is even decidedly unwise if

he attempts it—to adjust these things to theory  
THE HISTOR- and probability by elaborate analyses  
ICAL NOVEL. of character. That is not his business  
at all: he not only may, but should, leave it to  
quite a different kind of practitioner. His is the  
big brush, the bold foreshortening, the composition  
which is all the more effective according as it  
depends least upon over-subtle strokes and shades  
of line and colour. Not that he is to draw care-  
lessly or colour coarsely, but that niggling finish of  
any kind is unnecessary and even prejudicial to  
his effects. And in the recognition, at least in the  
practical recognition, of these laws of the craft, as  
Scott set the example, so he also left very little  
for any one else to improve upon. He may have  
been equalled; he has never been surpassed.

I have before now referred by anticipation to  
another point of his intuition, his instinctive grasp  
of the first law of the historical novel, that the  
nominal hero and heroine, the ostensibly central  
interest and story shall not be or concern historical  
persons, or shall concern them only in some aspect  
unrecorded or at best faintly traced in history.  
The advantages of this are so clear and obvious  
that it is astounding that they should have been  
overlooked as they were, not merely by 'prentices  
of all kinds and all times, but by persons of some-  
thing more than moderate ability like G. P. R.  
James and others. These advantages have been  
partly touched upon, but one of them has not, I  
think, been mentioned, and it may introduce to us



another very important feature of the subject. It is constantly useful, and it may at THE HISTOR- times be indispensable, for the his- ICAL NOVEL. torical novelist to take liberties with history. The extent to which this is permissible or desirable may indeed be matter for plentiful disagreement. It is certainly carrying matters too far to make, as in *Castle Dangerous*, a happy ending to a story the whole historical and romantic complexion of which required the ending to be unhappy; but Sir Walter was admittedly but the shadow of himself when *Castle Dangerous* was written. Although Dryasdust and Smelfungus have both done after their worst fashion in objecting to his anachronisms in happier days, yet I certainly think that it was not necessary to make Shakespeare the author of *Midsummer Night's Dream* in the eleventh year of his age, if not earlier, as is done in *Kenilworth*, or to play the tricks with chronology required by the narrative of the misdeeds of Ulrica in *Ivanhoe*. Nothing is gained in either of these cases for the story. But there are cases where the story does undoubtedly gain by taking liberties with history. And it is evident that this can be done much more easily and much more effectively when the actual historical characters whose life is, so to speak, "coted and marked," do not play the first parts as far as the interest of the story goes.

But it might be tedious to examine more in detail the special characteristics of work so well

known. Enough must have been said to show that THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. Scott had discovered, and to a great extent had discovered consciously, not merely how to write an historical novel, but how to teach others to write it. His critical faculty, if not extraordinarily subtle, was always as sound and shrewd as it was good-natured. And there is hardly a better, as there is not a more interesting, example of this combination than the remarks in the "Diary" under the dates of October 17 and 18, 1826, occasioned by Harrison Ainsworth's and Horace Smith's attempts in his style—*Sir John Chiverton* and *Brambletye House*. In one so utterly devoid of the slightest tendency to over-value himself, his adoption of Swift's phrase,

Which I was born to introduce,  
Refined it first and shewed its use,

is a very strong affidavit of claim; and it is one which, as we have seen, is absolutely justified. Not less so are the remarks which follow a little later, on what he calls, with his unfailing *epieikeia* his "own errors, or, if you will, those of the style." "One advantage," he says, "I think I still have over all of them. They may do it with a better grace, but I do it more naturally." And then in a succession of light taps with the finger he indicates not a few of the faults of the worst sort of historical novel: the acquiring information in order to write, instead of using in an unconstrained fashion what has become part of the regular furni-

ture of the mind ; the dragging in historical events by head and shoulders ; the too open THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. stealing of actual passages and pages from chronicles or previous works on the subject, and so forth ; though he ends up with his usual honesty by confessing once more his own occasional carelessness of the management of the story.

He did not consider that his own plea of being "hurried on so that he has no time to think of the story" is a great deal more than an excuse. There is extremely little danger of much fault being found, except by professional fault-finders, with any writer who neglects the conduct of his story because he has so much story to tell. It is the other people, the people who are at their wits' end to know what ought to come next, who are intolerable, not those who have such an abundance of arrows in their quiver that they sometimes pull out one the notch of which does not exactly fit the string. I remember reading Mr Crockett's *The Raiders*,—one of the best of those books, which have been recently written in the more or less direct following of Scott—when it first appeared. I had to read it "in the way of business" (as Mr Turnbull would say), and I soon saw that in the way of business there were many things that might be said against it. It was here and there too like this thing and that thing ; its parts did not hang very well together ; there were improbabilities not a few, and the crowning incident was



not a little wanting in reason. But, having noted THE HISTOR- down these things duly, I turned to the ICAL NOVEL. beginning of the book once more and read it straight through, every word of it, a second time for my own private and unprofessional delectation. And I should suppose that the same thing must have happened and happened often to critics between 1815 and 1830.

For who can ever praise enough, or read enough, or enjoy enough, those forty-eight volumes of such a reader's paradise as nowhere else exists? The very abundance and relish of their pure delightsomeness has obscured in them qualities which would have made a score of reputations. Of passion there may be little or none; that string in Scott's case, as in those of Bacon, of Milton, of Southey, and others, was either wanting, or the artist's hand shrank from playing on it. But there is almost everything else. I once began and mislaid, a collection of what would be called in our modern jargon "realist" details from Scott, which showed as shrewd a knowledge at least and as uncompromising an acknowledgment of the weaknesses of human nature as with a little jargon and a little brutality would have set up half a dozen psychological novelists,\* In the observation and delineation of his own

\* Curiously enough, after writing the above, I came across the following passage in a little-known but extraordinarily shrewd French critic of English literature, Mr Browning's friend M. Milsand. "Il y a plus de philosophie dans ses [Scott's] contes (quoique la philosophie n'en soit pas le caractère saillant) que dans bon nombre de romans philosophiques."

countrymen he is acknowledged to have excelled all other writers; by which I do not mean merely that no one has drawn Scotsmen as he has, but that no one writer has drawn that writer's countrymen as Scott has. And the consensus, I believe, of the best critics would put him next to Shakespeare as a creator of individual character of the miscellaneous human sort, however far he may be below not merely Shakespeare but Fielding, Thackeray, and perhaps Le Sage in a certain subtle intimacy of detail and a certain massive completeness of execution. And all these gifts—all these and many more—he put at the service of the kind that he “was born to introduce,” the kind of the historical novel.

Although Alexandre Dumas had begun to write years before Sir Walter Scott's death, he had not at that time turned his attention to the novels which have ranked him as second only to Sir Walter himself in that department. Nor was he by any means Scott's first French imitator. He was busy on dramatic composition, in which, though he never attained anything like Scott's excellence in his own kind of poetry, he was nearly as great an innovator in his own country and way. Nor can it be doubted that this practice helped him considerably in his later work, just as Scott's poetry had helped him, and in particular that it taught Dumas a more closely knit construction and a more constant “eye to the audience” than Scott had always shown. Not indeed that

the plots of Dumas, as plots, are by any means of exceptional regularity. The crimes and punishment of Milady may be said to communicate a certain unity to *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, the vengeance of Dantès to *Monte Cristo*, and other things to others. But when they are looked at from the strictly dramatic side, all more or less are "chronicle plays" in the form of novels, rather than novels; lengths of adventure prolonged or cut short at the pleasure or convenience of the writer rather than definite evolutions of a certain definite scheme, which has got to come to an end when the ball is fully unrolled. The advantage of Dumas's dramatic practice shows itself most in the business-like way in which at his best he works by *tableaux*, connected, it may be, with each other rather by sequence and identity of personages than by strict causality, but each possessing a distinct dramatic and narrative interest of its own, and so enchaining the attention. There are episodes without end in Dumas; but there are comparatively few (at least in his best work) of the "loose ends," of the incidents, neither complete in themselves nor contributing anything in particular to the general story, to which Sir Walter pleads guilty, and which certainly are to be found in him.

Another point in which Dumas may be said to have improved, or at any rate alternated, upon Scott, and which also may, without impropriety, be connected with his practice for the stage, is



the enormously increased part allotted to dialogue in his novels. Certainly Scott was not THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. weak in dialogue ; on the contrary, the intrinsic excellence of the individual speeches of his characters in humour, in truth to nature, in pathos, and in many other important points, is decidedly above the Frenchman's. But his dialogue plays a much smaller part in the actual evolution of the story. Take down at hazard three or four different volumes of Dumas from the shelf ; open them, and run over the pages, noting of what stuff the letterpress is composed. Then do exactly the same with the same number of Scott. You will find that the number of whole pages, and still more the number of consecutive pages, wholly filled with dialogue, or variegated with other matter in hardly greater proportion than that of stage directions, is far larger in the French than in the English master. It is true that the practice of Dumas varies in this respect. In his latter books especially, in his less good ones at all times, there is a much greater proportion of solid matter. But then the reason of this is quite obvious. He was here falling either in his own person, or by proxy, into those very practices of interpolating lumps of chronicle, and laboriously describing historic incident and scene, with which, in the passage above quoted, Scott reproaches his imitators. But at his best Dumas delighted in telling his tale as much as possible through the mouths of his characters. In all his most famous passages—

the scene at the Bastion Saint-Gervais in *Les Trois*  
THE HISTOR- *Mousquetaires*, the Vin de Porto and its  
ICAL NOVEL. ushering scenes in *Vingt Ans Après*, the  
choicest episodes of *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, the  
crises of *La Reine Margot* and *Les Quarante-Cinq*,  
the thing is always talked rather than narrated.  
It is hardly fanciful to trace Dumas's preference  
for heroes like D'Artagnan and Chicot to the fact  
that they had it by kind to talk.

I do not know whether it is worth while to lay  
much stress on another difference between Scott  
and Dumas—the much greater length of the latter's  
novels and his tendency to run them into series.  
Scott only did the latter once, in the case of *The*  
*Monastery* and *The Abbot*, while it was probably  
more a determination that the British public  
should like him yet, in his dealings with so tempt-  
ing a subject as the troubles of Queen Mary's  
reign, than any inherent liking for the practice that  
determined him to it in this case. Even if we  
neglect the trilogy system, of which the adventures  
of D'Artagnan and Chicot are the main specimens,  
the individual length of Dumas's books is much  
greater than that of Scott's. Putting such giants  
as *Monte Cristo* and the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*  
aside, *Vingt Ans Apres* would make, I should  
think, at least two *Waverleys*, and *La Reine*  
*Margot* (one of the shortest) an *Ivanhoe* and a  
half. But this increase in length was only a  
return to old practices; for Scott himself had been  
a great shortener of the novel. To say nothing of

the romances of chivalry and the later imitations of them, Le Sage, Richardson, Fielding, THE HISTOR- Smollett, Mrs Radcliffe, had all in their ICAL NOVEL. chief work run to a length far exceeding what Sir Walter usually thought sufficient. But I rather doubt whether even Mademoiselle de Scudéry's proverbial prolixity much exceeds in any one instance the length of the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*.

That this length is pretty closely connected with the conversational manner just noticed cannot I think, be doubted. There is nothing so endless as talk ; and inasmuch as an hour's leisurely speech will fill some thirty octavo pages, valiant talkers like Miss Bates must deliver (though fortunately not in a form which abides with posterity) their volume a day, year in and year out, given health and listeners, without any difficulty or much exertion. That is three hundred and sixty-five volumes a year, whereas five were all that even Southey's brazen-bowelled industry warranted itself to produce ; and I do not think that Sir Walter himself in his most tremendous bursts of energy exceeded the rate of about a dozen.

Of the advantages and disadvantages, on the other hand, of the length thus reintroduced into novel-writing, it is not possible to speak with equal confidence. People who read very fast, who like to read more than once, and who are pleased to meet old friends in constantly new situations, as a rule, I think, like long books ; but the average subscriber to circulating libraries does not. The



taste for them is perhaps the more generous as  
THE HISTOR- it certainly is the most ancient and  
ICAL NOVEL. most human. It showed itself in the  
cycles of the ancients and of mediæval romance:  
it positively revelled in the extraordinary filia-  
tions of the *Amadis* story; and it has continued  
to assert itself in different forms to the present  
day, now in that of long single books, now in  
that of direct series and continuations, now in that  
of books like Thackeray's and Trollope's, which  
are not exactly series, but which keep touch  
with each other by the community of more or  
fewer characters. Of course it is specially easy to  
tempt and indulge this taste in the historical  
department of novel-writing. Even as it is,  
Dumas himself has made considerable progress in  
the task of writing a connected novel-history of  
France from the English wars to the Revolution  
of 1789. I really do not know that, especially  
now when the taste for the romance seems to have  
revived somewhat vigorously, it would be an in-  
conceivable thing if somebody should write an  
English historical *Amadis* in more than as many  
generations as the original, deducing the fortunes of  
an English family from King Arthur to Queen  
Victoria. Let it be observed that I do not as a  
critic recommend this scheme, nor do I specially  
hanker after its results as a reader. But it is not  
an impossible thing, and it would hardly exceed  
the total of Dumas's printed work. I have never  
been able to count that mighty list of volumes

twice with the same result, a phenomenon well known in legend respecting the wonderful works of nature or of art. But it comes, I think, to somewhere about two hundred and forty volumes; that is to say, a hundred and twenty novels of the length of *Les Trois Mousquetaires* or *La Reine Margot*. And as that would cover the time suggested, at not more than ten or twelve years to a novel, it should surely be ample.

To return to a proper seriousness: the main points of strictly technical variation in Dumas as compared with Scott are thus the more important use made of dialogue, the greater length of the stories, and the tendency to run them on in series. In quality of enjoyment, also, the French master added something to his English model. If Scott is not deep (I think him much deeper than it is the fashion to allow), Dumas is positively superficial. His rapid and absorbing current of narrative gives no time for any strictly intellectual exertion on the part either of writer or reader; the style as style is even less distinct and less distinguished than Scott's; we receive not only few ideas but even few images of anything but action—few pictures of scenery, no extraordinarily vivid touches of customs or manners. Dumas is an infinitely inferior master of character to Scott; he can make up a personage admirably, but seldom attains to a real character. Chicot himself and Porthos are the chief exceptions; for D'Artagnan

is more a type than an individual, Athos is the THE HISTOR- incarnate gentleman chiefly, Aramis is ICAL NOVEL. incomplete and shadowy, and Monte Cristo is a mere creature of melodrama.

But Dumas excels Scott himself in the peculiar and sustained faculty by which he can hold his reader by and for the story. With Sir Walter one is never quite unconscious, and one is delighted to be conscious, of the existence and individuality of the narrator. The "architect, artist, and man" (may Heaven forgive me, as Scott certainly would, for coupling his idea in any way with that of the subject of this phrase!) is always more or less before us, with his vast, if not altogether orderly, reading, his ardent patriotism, his saturation with romance coexisting with the shrewdest common-sense and knowledge of business, above all that golden temperament which made him a man of letters without pedantry and without vanity, a man of the world without frivolity and without guile, a "man of good" without prudery and without goodness.

Of Dumas's personality (and no doubt this is in a way a triumph of his art) we never think at all. We think of nothing but of the story: whether D'Artagnan will ever bring the diamonds safe home; whether the compact between Richelieu and Milady can possibly be fulfilled; whether that most terrible of all "black strap" that flowed into the pewter pot when Grimaud tried the cask



will do its intended duty or not ; whether Margaret will be able to divert the silk cord in THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. Alençon's hand from its destination on La Môle's neck. No doubt Scott has moments of the same arresting excitement ; but they are not so much his direct object, and from the difference of his method they are not so prominent or so numerous or engineered in such a manner as to take an equally complete hold of the reader. No doubt the generation which as yet had not Scott affected to find similar moments in Mrs Radcliffe ; but oh ! the difference to us of the moment when Emily draws aside the Black Veil, and the moment when the corpse of Mor-daunt shoots above water with the moonlight playing on the gold hilt of the dagger ! Dumas indeed has no Wandering Willie ; he had not poetry enough in him for that. But in the scenes where Scott as a rule excels him—the scenes where the mere excitement of adventure is enhanced by nobility of sentiment—he has a few, with the death of Porthos at the head of them, which are worthy of Scott himself ; while of passages like the famous rescue of Henry Morton from the Cameronians he has literally hundreds.

It was, then, this strengthening and extending of the absorbing and exciting quality which the historical novel chiefly owed to Dumas, just as it owed its first just and true concoction and the indication of almost all the ways in which

it could seek perfection to Scott. I shall not, THE HISTOR. I think, be charged with being unjust ICAL NOVEL. to the pupil; but, wonderful as his work is, I think it not so much likely as certain that it never would have been done at all if it had not been for the Master.

## XII.

### THE HISTORICAL NOVEL.

#### III.—THE SUCCESSORS.

IT was evidently impossible that such a combination of luck and genius as the THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. Historical Novel, when at last it appeared from Scott's hands, should lack immediate and unlimited imitation. As has been said, some considerable number of years passed before the greatest of Sir Walter's successors,—the only successor who can be said to have made distinct additions to the style—turned his attention to novel-writing. But as the popularity of Scott, not only in his own country, but elsewhere, was instantaneous, so was the following of him. The peace after Waterloo assisted this popularity in the odd way in which political and historical coincidences often do influence the fortunes of literature; and almost the whole of Europe, besides English-speaking America, began not merely to read Scott, not merely to translate him, but to write in his style. It may even be



doubted whether the subsequent or simultaneous  
THE HISTOR- vogue abroad of his poetical supplanter  
ICAL NOVEL. Byron did not assist the popularity of  
his novels ; for different as the two men and the  
two styles intrinsically are, they have no small  
superficial resemblance of appeal. In France the  
Royalism and the Romanticism alike of the Re-  
storation fastened eagerly on the style, and Victor  
Hugo was only the greatest, if the most immature,  
of scores of writers who hastened to produce the  
historical, especially the chivalrous and medieval,  
romance. Germany did likewise, and set on foot  
as well a trade of "Scotch novels made in Ger-  
many," of which I believe the famous *Walladmor*  
(to which Scott himself refers, and the history  
of which De Quincey has told at characteristic  
length) was by no means the only example.  
*Walladmor* appeared in 1823. G. P. R. James'  
*Richelieu*, the first English example of consider-  
able note by an author who gave his name, came  
in 1825 ; while in America Cooper was four  
years earlier with *The Spy*.

Hugo himself began writing novels (obviously  
on Scott's suggestion, however little they might  
be like Scott) with *Han d'Islande* in the same  
year as *Walladmor*, and Germany, though cling-  
ing still to her famous and to some extent in-  
digenous romance of fantasy, produced numerous  
early imitators of Scott of a less piratical character  
than the Leipsic forger. Italy with Manzoni and  
*I Promessi Sposi* in 1827 was a little, but only

a little later, so that long before the darkness came on him and to some extent before even THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. his worldly fortunes were eclipsed, Scott could literally see as no author before him or since has ever seen the whole of Europe not merely taking its refreshment under the boughs of the tree he had planted, but nursing seeds and shoots of it in foreign ground. In comparison with this the greatest literary dictatorships of the past were but titular royalties. Voltaire, whose influence came nearest to it in intensity and diffusion, was merely the cleverest, most versatile, and most piquant writer of an age whose writers were generally of the second class. He had invented no kind, for even the satirical fantasy-tale was but borrowed from Hamilton and others. As a provider of patterns and models, he was inferior both to Montesquieu and to Rousseau. But Scott enjoyed in this respect such a royalty in both senses, the sense of pre-eminence and the sense of patent rights, as had never been known before. When he saved the beginning of *Waverley* from among the fishing-tackle in the old writing-desk, no one knew how to write a historical novel, because no one had in the proper sense written such a thing, though many had tried. In a few years the whole of Europe was greedily reading historical novels, and a very considerable part of the literary population of Europe was busily writing them.

Indeed Scott was still in possession of all his

faculties, and the imitations of him in England as well as in other countries had not had time, or had not fallen under the hands of the right man to produce anything but mere imitation, when a book of far greater merit than anything else anterior to Dumas appeared. I do not mean *Notre Dame de Paris*, for though this is historical after a kind, the history is the least part of it, and Hugo with all his Titanic power never succeeded in writing a good novel of any sort. The book to which I refer and which appeared in 1829, a good deal before *Notre Dame de Paris*, is Mérimée's *Chronique de Charles IX*. This book has been very variously judged, and Mérimée's most recent and best critical biographer, M. Augustin Filon, does not, I think, put it quite as high as I do. It has of course obvious faults. Mérimée, who had already followed Scott in *La Jacquerie*, though for some reason or other he chose in that case to give a quasi-dramatic form to the work, had all his life the peculiarity (which may be set down either to some excess of the critical or some flaw of the creative part in him) of taking a style, doing something that was almost or quite a masterpiece in it, and then dropping it altogether. He did so in this instance, and the *Chronique* had no follower from his hand. But it showed the way to all Frenchmen who followed, including Dumas himself, the way of transporting the Scottish pattern into France, and blending



with it the attractions (including one peculiarly French and inconvenient) necessary to THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. acclimatise it.

It cannot however be denied that in this immense and unprecedented dissemination the old proverb of the fiddle and the rosin was plentifully illustrated and justified. It was only Scott's good-nature which led him to concede that his English imitators might perhaps "do it with a better grace;" while there is no doubt at all that he was far within the mark in saying that he himself "did it more natural." The curses which have been already mentioned, and others, rested on the best of them; even upon James, even upon Ainsworth, even upon Bulwer. I used to be as fond of *Henry Masterton* and *Old St Paul's*, and those about them, as every decently constructed boy ought to be; and I can read a good many of the works of both authors now with a great deal of resignation and with a very hearty preference for them over most of the novels of the present day. I am afraid I cannot say quite so much of the first Lord Lytton, who never seems to me to have found his proper sphere in novel writing till just before his death. But still no competent critic, I suppose, would deny that *The Last Days of Pompeii* is one of the very best attempts to do what has never yet been thoroughly done, or that *The Last of the Barons* is a very fine chronicle novel. So too I remember reading *Brambletye*

*House* itself with a great deal of pleasure not THE HISTOR- so very many years ago. But in the ICAL NOVEL. handling of all of these and of their immediate contemporaries and successors before the middle of the century there is what Mr Morris's melancholy lover found in running over that list of his loves as he rode unwitting to the Hill of Venus—"some lack, some coldness."

One could forgive the two horsemen readily enough, as well as other tricks of James's, if he were not at once too conventional and too historical. To read *Mary of Burgundy* and before or after that exercise to read *Quentin Durward*, so near to it in time and subject, is to move in two different worlds. In *Quentin Durward* you may pick holes enough if you choose, as even Bishop Heber, a contemporary, a friend, I think, of Scott's, a good man, and a good man of letters, does in his *Indian Journal*. It takes some uncommon liberties with historical accuracy, and it would not escape scot-free as a novel from a charge of *Lèse-probabilité*. But it is all perfectly alive and of a piece; the story, whether historical or fictitious, moves uniformly and takes the reader along with it; the characters (though I will give up Hayraddin to the sainted manes of the Bishop) are real people who do real things and talk real words. When the excellent Mr Senior, meaning to be complimentary, calls Louis and Charles "perfectly faithful copies," he uses a perfectly inadequate

expression. He might as well call Moroni's *Tailor* or Velasquez' *Philip IV.* a perfectly faithful copy. They are no copies; they are re-creations, agreeing with all we know of what, for want of a better word, we call the originals, but endowed with independent life.

In *Mary of Burgundy*, which is generally taken to be one of the best of its author's, as in all that author's books more or less, this wholeness and symmetry are too often wanting. The history, where it is history, is too often tediously lugged in; the fictitious characters lack at once power and keeping; and there is a fatal convention of language, manners, general tone which is the greatest fault of all. Instead of the only less than Shakespearean universality of Scott's humanity—which does equally for characters of the eleventh, the fifteenth, or the eighteenth century, simply because it is always human,—James gives us a sort of paint-and-pasteboard substitute for flesh and blood which cannot be said to be definitely out of character with any particular time, simply because it never could have been vividly appropriate to any time at all. In fact such caricatures as *Barbazure* were more than justified by the historical-romantic novels of sixty years ago, which might have gone far, and indeed did go some way, to inspire a fear that the kind would become as much a nuisance and would fall as far short of its own highest



possibilities as the Romance of Terror which THE HISTORICAL NOVEL had preceded it. James was by no means an ignorant man, or a man of little literary power. But he had not that gift of character which is the greatest of all the gifts of a novelist of whatever kind, and as a historical novelist he was not sufficiently saturated with the spirit of any period. Far less had he that extension of the historical faculty which enabled Scott, though he might make small blunders easy to be detected by any schoolmaster if not by any school-boy, at once to grasp the spirit of almost any period of which he had himself read something or of any person with whom he was himself in even slight sympathy.

Harrison Ainsworth had I think more "fire in his belly" than James ever had; but he burned it out too soon, and unluckily for him he lived and wrote for a very long time after the flame had changed to smoke. Fewer people perhaps now know than formerly knew that most successful of Father Prout's serious or quasi-serious poems, the piece in which a moral is drawn from the misfortune of the bird in

—the current old  
Of the deep Garonne

for the warning of the then youthful novelist. But it was certainly needed. I am glad to believe, and indeed partly to know, that Ainsworth has not lost his hold of the younger

generation to-day as some other novelists have. His latest books never I think came THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. into any cheap form, and therefore are not likely to have come in many boys' way; but sixpenny editions of *The Tower of London* and *Windsor Castle* are seen often enough in the hands of youth, which certainly they do not misbecome. Not many, however, I should fancy, either now read or ever have read Ainsworth much when they were once out of their nonage.

He has, as indeed I have said, more fire, more spirit than James. He either found out for himself, or took the hint early from Dumas, that abundant dialogue will make a story go more trippingly off than abundant description. But there is a great deal of smoke mixed with his fire, more than with that of James; his chariots though they move, drive heavily; he writes anything but good English; and his dialogue is uncommonly poor stuff for any eye or ear which is naturally, or by study has become, attentive to "keeping." It may, I think, be laid down without much rashness that though the attractions which will suffice to lure a reader through one reading, and in some cases even enable him to enjoy or endure a second, are very numerous and various, there must, in all but the very rarest cases, be one or both of two things, style and character, to make him return again and again to any novel. Now Ainsworth certainly had neither of these; he had not nearly so much of

either as James. Most of the schoolboys who read THE HISTOR- him could with a little practice write as ICAL NOVEL. well as he does; and though his puppets box it about in a sufficiently businesslike manner, they are puppets of the most candid and unmistakable kind. As far as I can remember Crichton and Esclairmonde used to affect me with more interest than most of them: and I am by no means certain that this was not as much due to the lady's name as to anything else. Generally speaking, one does not, even as a boy, feel them to be alive at all when the story is ended. They have rattled their mimic quarterstaves bravely and gone back to their box. After a time the novelist lost the faculty even of making them rattle their quarterstaves; and then the wreck was indeed total.

The third member of the trio, who provided England with historical novels during the second quarter of the century, had of course far more purely literary talent than either James or Ainsworth. I have never been able to rate Bulwer so highly as many people have done; but no one can possibly deny him a literary talent not often surpassed in volume, in variety, or in certain kinds of vigour. Why he never did anything better in any one kind than he at least seems to me to have done is a question over which I have often puzzled myself. Perhaps it was a one-sided critical faculty—it was certainly, to say the least, unfortunate for a man in



the spring of his literary career to try to laugh down Mr Alfred Tennyson, and in the winter thereof to try the same operation upon Mr William Morris. Perhaps it was the diffusion and dispersion of his aims and energies between politics, literature, and society, between prose, verse, and drama. Perhaps it was the unlucky sentimentality of thought and the still more unlucky tawdriness of language which so long defrayed the exercises of satirists. At any rate, he never seems to me to have done anything great or small that can be called a masterpiece, except *The Haunted and the Haunters*, which is all but, if not quite, perfect.\* Still he did many things surprisingly well, and I do not know that his historical novels were not among the best of them. That Lord Tennyson, who admired few things at all and fewer if any bad ones, should have admired *Harold* is almost decisive in its favour, though I own I like *The Last of the Barons* better myself, and consider it all but what it ought to be. If you mixed *The Last of the Barons* with *The Black Arrow*,

\* It is perhaps desirable to lay stress on the word "perfect" lest anybody should exclaim "What! you put a short ghost-story before *My Novel*?" Now I confess that I do not attach much importance to mere bulk or mere shortness one way or the other. But in the text I am only speaking of the relative consummateness of a thing in its own kind. Both *My Novel*, and others of the books, especially the latest (I have no small admiration for *Kenelm Chillingly*), may be more considerable things in a kind deserving more consideration than the thing and the kind of *The Haunted and the Haunters*. But they are not so consummate.

another faulty but admirable book of another generation, but on the same subject, you would go very near to perfection. *The Last Days of Pompeii*, though it has a double share of the two faults mentioned above, is, as has been said, easily first in its class, or first except *Hypatia*, of which more presently. No doubt the playwright's faculty which enabled Lord Lytton to write more than one of the few very good acting English plays of the century, stood him in stead here as it stood Dumas. Perhaps this very faculty prevented him more than it prevented Dumas from writing a supremely good novel. For the narrative and the dramatic faculties are after all not the same thing and the one is never a perfect substitute for the other. Yet I happen to know that there are some who, regarding him with considerably more admiration than I do, set his shortcomings down to a far more serious and damaging disability than this. They doubt whether he had in any great, or at least in any constant degree, the faculty of making a "live" figure—one of those which can defy time and occupy space. Nor of course, if this is once admitted, is there anything more to be said.

No reasonable space would suffice for a detailed criticism, while a mere catalogue would be very unamusing, of the imitators of these men, or of Scott directly, who practised the historical novel from seventy to forty years ago. The best of them (so far as I can remember) was an anony-

mous writer, whose name I think was Emma Robinson, and whose three chief works THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. were *Whitehall*, *Whitefriars*, and *Owen Tudor*. These books held a station about midway between James and Ainsworth, and they seem to me to have been as superior to the latter in interest as they were to the former in bustle and movement. But I think there can be no doubt that the influence of Dumas, who had by their time written much, was great and direct on them. More than once have I attempted in my graver years to read again that well-loved friend of my boyhood James Grant; but each time my discomfiture has been grievous. The excellent Chaplain-General Gleig was a James of less fertility and liveliness, indeed I fear he must be pronounced to have deserved the same description as Mr Jingle's packing-cases. In some others, such as G. W. M. Reynolds, I confess that my study is but little. But in such things of Reynolds as I have read, though it would be absurd to say that there is no ability, I never found it devoted to anything but a very inferior class of bookmaking.

Marryat, close as he came to the historical kind, seems to have felt an instinctive dislike or disqualification for it; and it will be noticed that his more purely historical scenes and passages,—the account of the Mutiny at the Nore in *The King's Own*, that of the battle of Cape St Vincent in *Peter Simple*, and so forth—are as a rule episodes and scarcely even episodes. And though Lever wrought



the historical part of his stories more closely and intimately into their substance, yet I should class him only with the irregulars of the Historical Brigade. He is of course most like a regular in *Charles O'Malley*. Yet even there one sees the difference. The true historical novelist, as has been pointed out more than once, employs the reader's presumed interest in historical scene and character as an instrument to make his own work attractive. Lever does nothing of the kind. His head was full of the stories he had heard at Brussels from the veterans of the Peninsula, of Waterloo, and even of the Grande Armée. But it was at least equally full (as he showed long after when he had got rid of the borrowed stories) of quaint inventions and shrewd observations of his own. And even as a historical novelist the original part got the better of him. Wellington and Stewart and Crawford are little more than names to us; they are not one-tenth part as real or one-hundredth part as interesting as Major Monsoon. Nor is it the actual fate of war, at Ciudad Rodrigo or on the Coa, that engrosses us so much as the pell-mell fighting, the feats of horsemanship, the devilled kidneys (that for some incomprehensible reason so did irritate Edgar Poe) and all the helter-skelter liberties with probability and chronology and everything else which cram that wonderful and to some people never wearisome medley.

So too we need not trouble ourselves much with

Dickens's efforts in the kind for a not dissimilar reason. *Barnaby Rudge* earlier and *A Tale of Two Cities* later, work in a great deal of historical fact and some historical character, and both fact and character are studied with a good deal of care. But the historical characters are almost entirely unimportant; while the whole thing in each case is pure Dickens in its faults as in its merit. We are never really in the Gordon Riots of 1780 or in the Terror of thirteen years later. We are in the author's No Man's Land of time and space where manners and ethics and language and everything else are marked with "Charles Dickens," and the well-known flourish after it.

It was about the middle of the century, I think, or a little earlier, that the vogue which had sped the Historical Novel for more than a technical generation began to fail it, at least in England with which we are chiefly concerned. The Dumas furnaces were still working full blast abroad, and of course there was no actual cessation of production at home. But the public taste, either out of satiety, or out of mere caprice, or tempted by attractive novelties, began to go in quite other directions. Charlotte Brontë had already begun, and George Eliot was about to begin styles of novels entirely different from the simple and rather conventional romance which writers, unable to keep at the level of Scott, had taken to turning out. The general run of Dickens's performance

had been in a quite different direction. So was THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. Thackeray's, which in its perfection was just beginning, though he was to produce not a little and at least one unsurpassable thing in the historic kind. Many minor kinds typified by work as different as *The Heir of Redclyffe* and *Guy Livingstone*, as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Warden* were springing up or to spring. And so the Historical Novel though never exactly abandoned (for George Eliot herself and most of the writers already named or alluded to, as well as others like Whyte-Melville, tried it now and then) dropped, so to speak, into the ruck, and for a good many years was rather despitiously spoken of by critics until the popularity of Mr Blackmore's *Lorna Doone* came to give it a new lease.

Yet in the first decade of this its disfavour, and while most writers' and readers' attention was devoted to other things, it could boast of the two best books that had been written in it since the death of Scott; one an imperishable masterpiece, the other a book which, popular as it has been, has never had its due yet,—*Esmond* and *Westward Ho!*

That when anybody is perpetually laughing at another body or at something, this facetiousness really means that the laughter is secretly enamoured of the object of ridicule, is a great though not an universal truth which has been recognised and illustrated by authorities of the



most diverse age and excellence from the author of *Much Ado About Nothing* downwards. THE HISTOR-  
It was well seen of Thackeray in the ICAL NOVEL.  
matter of the Historical Novel. He had been  
jesting at it for the best part of twenty years—  
that is to say for the whole of his literary career.  
He had made free with it a thousand times in a  
hundred different ways, from light touches and  
gibes in his miscellaneous articles to the admirable  
set of Burlesques, to the longer parodies, if parodies  
they can properly be called, of *Rebecca and  
Rowena* (one of his best things) and *The Legend  
of the Rhine*, and on the biggest scale of all to  
that strange unpleasant masterly failure *Catherine*.  
It is to be presumed, though it is not certain,  
that when he thus made fun of historical novels,  
he did not think he should live to be a historical  
novelist. Notwithstanding which, as every one  
knows, he lived to write not one, but two, and  
the beginning of a third.

It is not necessary to say much here about  
*Denis Duval*, or to attempt to decide between  
the opinions of those who say that it would have  
been the author's masterpiece, and of those who  
think that it could at best have stood to *The  
Virginians* as *The Virginians* stands to *Esmond*.  
It is however worth noting that *Denis Duval*  
displays that extremely careful and methodical  
scaffolding and marshalling of historical materials  
which Thackeray himself had been almost the  
first to practise, and in which he has never been

surpassed. Scott had set the example, not too well followed, of acquiring a pretty thorough familiarity with the history and no small one with the literature of the time of his story; and he had accidentally or purposely brought in a good deal of local and other knowledge. But he had not made the display of this latter by any means a rule, and he had sometimes notoriously neglected it. Nor did anybody till Thackeray himself make it a point of honour to search the localities, to acquire all manner of small details from guide-books and county histories and the like, to work in scraps of colour and keeping from newspapers and novels and pamphlets. Dickens, it is true, had already done something of the kind in reference to his own style of fiction; but Dickens as has been said was only a historical novelist by accident, and he was at no time a bookish man. The new, or at least the improved practice was of course open to the same danger as that which wrecked the labours of the ingenious Mr Strutt; and it was doubtless for this reason that Scott in the prefatory discussion to *The Betrothed* made "the Preses" sit upon the expostulations of Dr Dryasdust and his desire that "Lhuyd had been consulted." Too great attention to veracity and propriety of detail is very apt to stifle the story by overlaying it. Still the practice when in strong and cunning hands no doubt adds much to the attraction of the novel; and it is scarcely necessary to say more than that

all the better historical novelists for the last forty years have followed Thackeray, and that Thackeray himself by no means impro-  
THE HISTORICAL NOVEL.  
bably took a hint from Macaulay's practice in history itself.

Another innovation of Thackeray's, or at least an alteration so great as almost to be an invention, was that adjustment of the whole narrative and style to the period of the story of which *Esmond* is the capital and hitherto unapproached example. Scott, as we have seen, had, by force rather of creative genius than of elaborate study, devised a narrative style which, with very slight alterations in the dialogue, would do for any age. But he had not tried much to model the vehicle of any particular story strictly to the language and temper of that story's time. Dumas had followed him with a still greater tendency to general modernisation. Scott's English followers had very rarely escaped the bastard and intolerable jargon of the stage. But Thackeray in *Esmond* did really clothe the thought of the mid-nineteenth century (for the thought is after all of the nineteenth century) in the language of the early eighteenth with such success as had never been seen before and such as I doubt will never be seen again. It must be admitted that the result, though generally, is not universally approved. I have known it urged by persons whose opinions are not to be lightly discredited, that the book is after all something of a *tour de force*, that there is an irksome constraint and an unnatural air about



it, and that, effective as a falsetto may be, it never THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. can be so really satisfactory as a native note. We need not argue this out. It is perhaps best, though there be a little confession and avoidance in the evasion, to adopt or extend the old joke of Condé or Charles the Second, and wish heartily that those who find fault with *Esmond* as falsetto would, in falsetto or out of it, give us anything one-twentieth part as good.

For the merits of that wonderful book, though they may be set off and picked out by its manner and style, are in the main independent thereof. The incomparable character of Beatrix Esmond, the one complete woman of English prose fiction, would more than suffice to make any book a masterpiece. And it would not be difficult to show that the historical novel no less than the novel generally may claim her. But the points of the book which, if not historical in the sense of having actually happened, are historic-fictitious,—the entry of Thomas Lord Castlewood and his injured Viscountess on their ancestral home, the duel of Frank Esmond and Mohun, the presentation of the Gazette by General Webb to his Commander-in-Chief at point of sword, and the immortal scene in the turret chamber with James the Third—are all of the very finest stamp possible, as good as the best of Scott and better than the best of Dumas. In a certain way *Esmond* is the crown and flower of the historical novel; “the flaming limits of the world” of fiction have been

reached in it with safety to the bold adventurer, but with an impossibility of progress further to him or to any other. THE HISTORICAL NOVEL.

One scene in the unequal and, I think, rather unfairly abused sequel,—the scene where Harry fails to recognise Beatrix's youthful portrait,—is the equal of any in *Esmond*, but this is not of the strictly or specially historical kind. And indeed the whole of *The Virginians*, though there is plenty of local colour and no lack of historical personages, is distinctly less historical than its forerunner. It is true that both time and event so far as History goes, are much less interesting; and I have never been able to help thinking that the author was consciously or unconsciously hampered by a desire to please both Englishmen and Americans. But whatever the cause may be it is certain that the historical element is far less strong in *The Virginians* than in *Esmond*, and that such interest as it has is the interest of the domestic novel, the novel of manners, the novel of character, rather than of the novel of history.

*Esmond* was published in 1852. Before the next twelve-month was out *Hypatia* appeared, and it was followed within two years more by *Westward Ho!* In one respect and perhaps in more than one, these two brilliant books could not challenge comparison with even weaker work of Thackeray's than *Esmond*. Neither in knowledge of human nature, nor (still less) in power of projecting the results of that knowledge into the

creation of character, nor in the adjustment to THE HISTOR- sequence of the minor and major ICAL NOVEL. events of life, was Kingsley the equal of his great contemporary. But as has been sufficiently pointed out, the most consummate command of character in its interior working is not necessary to the historical novelist. And in the gifts which are necessary to that novelist, Kingsley was very strong indeed,—not least so in that gift of adapting the novel of the past to the form and pressure of the present, which if not a necessary, and indeed sometimes rather a treacherous and questionable advantage, is undoubtedly an advantage in its way. He availed himself of this last to an unwise extent perhaps in drawing the Raphael of *Hypatia*, just as in *Westward Ho!* he gave vent to some of the anti-Papal feelings of his day to an extent sufficient to make him in more recent days furiously unpopular with Roman Catholic critics, who have not always honestly avowed the secret of their depreciation. Nay, I have recently heard, with almost incredulous amusement, that some younger critics who sympathise with Liberalism in the form into which Mr Gladstone brought it, are so shocked and disgusted at Kingsley's opinions that they can hardly read his work. This is sufficiently odd to me: for others of these opinions are quite as opposite to mine, and I never found the opposition interfere in the very least with my own enjoyment.



But the solid as well as original merits of these two books are such as cannot THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. possibly be denied by any fair criticism which takes them as novels and not as something else. The flame which had not yet cleared itself of smoke in the earlier efforts of *Alton Locke* and *Yeast*, which was to flicker, and alternate bright with dimmer intervals, in *Two Years Ago* and *Hereward the Wake*, blazed with astonishing brilliancy in both. I think I have read *Westward Ho!* the oftener; but I hardly know which I like the better. No doubt if Kingsley has escaped in *Hypatia* the curious curse which seems to rest on the classical-historical novel, it is by something not unlike one of those tricks whereby Our Lady and the Saints outwit Satan in legend. Not only is there much more of the thought and sentiment of the middle of the nineteenth century than of the beginning of the fifth, but the very antiquities and local colour of the time itself are a good deal advanced and made to receive much of the mediæval touch which, as we have observed, is in possible keeping with the modern, rather than of that elder spirit from which we are so helplessly divided.

But this is a perfectly legitimate stratagem and the success of it is wonderful. If no figure (except perhaps the slightly sketched one of Pelagia) is of the first order for actual life, not one falls below the second, which, let it be observed, is a very high class for the creations of fiction. The action

never fails or makes a fault; the dialogue, if a little mannered and literary now and then, is always crisp and full of pulse. But the splendid tableaux of which the book is full, tableaux artfully and even learnedly composed but thoroughly alive, make the great charm and the great merit of it as a historical novel. The voyage down the Nile; the night riots and the harrying of the Jews; the panorama (I know no other word for it, but the thing is one of the finest in fiction), of the defeat of Heraclian; the scene in the theatre at Alexandria; the murder of Hypatia and the vengeance of the Goths;—all of these are not only bad to beat but in their own way, like all thoroughly good things, they cannot be beaten. Not that the book in the least degree drags between them. On the contrary the reader is carried on from start to finish as he never is save in the best books. But I think these tableaux, these “broad” if we may say so, of the stream of story, are the triumph of it; and if I were a Cræsus I should have one of the halls of my Palace of Art exclusively and completely frescoed with scenes from *Hypatia*.

The attractions of *Westward Ho!* are less pictorial than those of its forerunner, which exceeds almost any novel that I know in this respect; but they are even more strictly historic and more closely connected with historical action. Minute accuracy was never Kingsley's *forte*; and here, though rather less than elsewhere, he laid himself

open to the cavils of the enemy. But on the whole, if not in detail, he had acquired THE HISTORICAL NOVEL. a more than competent knowledge of Elizabethan thought and sentiment, and had grasped the action and passion of the time with thorough and appreciative sympathy. He had moreover thoroughly imbued himself with the spirit of the regions over sea which he was to describe, and he had a mighty action or series of actions, real or feigned, for his theme. The result was once more what may fairly be called a masterpiece. There is again perhaps only one character, Salvation Yeo, who is distinctly of the first class as a character; for Amyas is a little too typical, a little too much of the Happy Warrior who has one temptation and overcomes it. Frank (the enemy may say and there may be some difficulty in gainsaying him) is mawkish; Rose a doll; Don Guzman a famous "portrait of a Spaniard" craped and sworded duly; Ayacanora any savage princess. But even these go through their motions quite satisfactorily; and all the minor characters from Cary and Jack downward among the fictitious, from Sir Richard Grenvile among the real, are as good as any reasonable person can desire. And once more, though with the slight change above noticed, the separate acts and scenes hurry the reader along in the most admirable fashion. From the day when Amyas finds the horn to the day when he flings away the sword (a quaint, but of course not intentional,



reminder of the old ballad) the chronicle goes on with step as light as it is steady, with interest as well maintained as it is intense. What anybody likes best will depend on idiosyncrasy. Only, if he knows a good historical novel, and one of the very best possible, when he sees it, if he is not uncritically deterred by differences in religion and politics, in nationality and literature, he must like *Westward Ho!* There is no hope for him in this particular if he does not. He may be a very good man: he may be a very good judge of other novels; but he does not know a historical novel when he sees it.

It may seem odd that after the appearance of three such books in little more than three years the style which they represented should have lost popularity. But such was the fact for reasons partly assigned already, and similar phenomena are by no means uncommon in literary history. For the best part of twenty years the historical novel was a little out of fashion. How it revived with Mr Blackmore's masterpiece, and how it has since been taken up with ever increasing zest, everybody knows. But the efforts of our present benefactors to the public are in all cases unfinished, and in some, we may hope, have a long career to run before the finish comes. Those who make them are happily alive, and "stone dead hath no fellow," for critical purposes as for others.

So what success their efforts met  
The critic will not weigh,—as yet.

But the mere fact of their existence and of their flourishing makes it all the more in-<sup>THE HISTOR-</sup>teresting to survey the history of what <sup>ICAL NOVEL.</sup> is still among the youngest,—though it has been trying to be born ever since a time which would have made it quite the eldest—of the kinds of Prose Fiction.

### XIII.

#### SOME GREAT BIOGRAPHIES.

IT is one of the best worn of commonplaces  
GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. that there is no book so generally  
interesting as a well done biography,  
and none which is so rarely well done or so  
difficult to do well. But there is often a good  
deal of truth in commonplaces, and there is a  
very great deal of it in this. Putting aside books  
read owing to some fashion or fancy of the  
time, and those which lend themselves to reading  
simply because they require absolutely no know-  
ledge or intelligence in those who read them, and  
those in which positive genius insists upon atten-  
tion being paid to it, no books have been so  
steadily popular with the best class of readers  
as the great biographies. On the other hand an  
undeviating consensus of critics (whose natural  
depravity could hardly have avoided slipping into  
truth now and then if their opinion was feigned)  
agrees that nothing is so bad as the average  
biography. It may not be unamusing or unprofit-



able to take some admittedly successful examples, in the chief different kinds, and endeavour to see what makes them good ; GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. it will certainly not be difficult to discern and indicate in passing what makes the others bad.

All biography is obviously and naturally divided into two kinds. There is the biography pure and simple, in which the whole of the materials is passed through the alembic of the biographer, and in which few if any of these materials appear except in an altered and digested condition. This, though apparently the oldest, is artistically the most perfect kind. Its shortest examples are always its best, and some of the best and shortest are among the best things in literature. The *Agricola* of Tacitus at one end of the list and Southey's *Nelson* almost at the other may save us the trouble of a long enumeration of the masterpieces ; while nobody needs to be told that the list ranges from masterpieces like these down to those that *ego vel Cluvienus* may write. There has always been a considerable demand for this sort of thing ; but it is not quite the kind of biography which has been specially popular for the last century, and which has produced the famous books to which I have already alluded. This is the kind of "applied" or "mixed" biography, including letters from and to the hero, anecdotes about him, and the like, connected and wrought into a whole by narrative and comment of the author, or, as he sometimes calls himself, the

editor. To this belong more or less wholly the  
GREAT great biographies which I shall take  
BIOGRAPHIES. for texts, Boswell's *Johnson*, Moore's  
*Byron*, Lockhart's *Scott*, Carlyle's *Sterling* (much  
smaller than the others, for reasons, but distinctly  
on the same lines with them), and, of books quite  
recent, Sir George Trevelyan's *Macaulay*. And  
to this class also, for reasons very easy to under-  
stand, belong almost all the biographies recently  
produced of men recently living. The reasons I  
say are easy to find. There is the great popularity  
of the great examples: there is the demand aris-  
ing from this popularity; but most of all there  
is the fatal facility of the proceeding in appearance,  
and in appearance only.

There can of course be no doubt that to the  
inexperienced it looks easy enough. In the first  
kind of biography the writer must to some extent  
master a considerable quantity of matter and  
subject it to some kind of intellectual or quasi-  
intellectual process of his own. At the very worst,  
the absolutely least, he must frame a sufficient  
number of sentences in his own head and (unless  
he dictates) write them with his own fingers,—a  
number sufficient to fill the space between the  
covers of the book. And, unless he is a quite  
abnormally stupid or conceited man, he will be  
more or less conscious that he is doing this well  
or ill, sufficiently or insufficiently. He cannot to  
any great extent merely extract or quote. He  
must create, or at any rate build, or do something

that may at least cheat himself into the idea that he is building or creating.

GREAT

BIOGRAPHIES.

The second path is in comparison quite a primrose one. In most cases the biographer by hypothesis finds himself in possession of a certain, often a considerable, stock of material in the way of diaries, letters and what not. Even if he has struck out the notion of the book for himself and is not ready furnished with his materials by executorship, appointment of friends, and the like, his own unskilled labour or that of a few jackals at public and other libraries will generally stock him amply with all the stuff he wants. Very often this stuff is, in part at least, really interesting. What more simple than to calendar it; to omit whatever is more than is wanted to fill the one, two or three volumes ordered or accepted by the publisher; to string the rest together with a "John-a-Nokes was born on the —th of—— Of his earliest years we find" and so on; to insert here and there a reference, a reminiscence, a reflection, or a connecting narrative; and, if the operator be very conscientious, to wind up with an appreciation or summary, "We have thus followed a remarkable (or a painful, as the case may be) career to its close. Had this," and so forth? What, I repeat, more simple?

"It is not more stiff than that," says the engaging idiom of the Gaul. At any rate there is certainly a large and apparently an increasing number of persons, many of them educated, pre-



sumably not unintelligent, certainly not unacquainted with books, things, and men, GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. who consider that there is no greater "stiffness" in it. Any competent critic, even any tolerably intelligent reader who dutifully studies or skims his new volumes from Mudie's, could name books of this kind within the last few years, nay, within the last few months, some of which had no justification whatever for their existence; others which a really skilful hand would have reduced to a small volume or even to an ordinary quarterly essay; others which, though capable of having been made into books of the right sort by the right treatment, had only been made into books of the wrong sort by the wrong treatment. Anybody on the other hand who remembers many thoroughly satisfactory books of the kind for some years past must either be a much more fortunate or a much less fastidious reader and critic than I can pretend to be.\* Let us therefore turn over once more those famous biographies of the kind that are good, and see if the secrets of their goodness are capable of being disengaged.

It will be evident, and may possibly have been already objected by some thorough-going Boswellian, that the first, and as he would say the

\* It so happens that since this paper first appeared a rather unusually large number of biographies—sometimes of the first interest in subject—have been published. But I fear hardly one of them is likely to challenge admission into the select class on the score of execution.

greatest, has some marked differences from the others. This may be partly due to GREAT the fact that Boswell had practically BIOGRAPHIES. no model when he wrote his extraordinary book, while the others all wrote with that book more or less consciously before them. It may be due also to the other fact that for by far the greater part of his hero's life he did not know him at all; while for the rest he had exceptionally full stores of personal communication to draw upon. A considerable variation of treatment was therefore almost of necessity imposed on him. To generalise about Boswell is a very perilous task. Almost everything possible has been said: and most, or at least many, of these things clash and hurtle like the elements in chaos. I shall give no opinion here whether Boswell was the specially inspired zany of Macaulay, or the man of some foibles but of good brain and heart on the whole, and of an intelligent rather than blind devotion to his master, whom Carlyle preferred and who has been of late years more and more the favourite. I do not myself pretend to rank in the most ardent section of Boswellians. Full of delightful matter as the book is, it seems to me a book rather for perpetual dips,—dips which should leave no part of it unexplored, but interrupted and comparatively short—than for the long steady swim which the very greatest literary streams invite, sustain, and make delightful. It would indeed scarcely be possible

for even the most rapid reader to read Boswell  
GREAT or Lockhart or Moore through at a  
BIOGRAPHIES. sitting, unless it were as long as the  
gambling sederunt in *The Young Duke*. But I  
have read Lockhart often, and I hope to read him  
often again, on successive evenings from beginning  
to end. I have read Moore at least once if not  
twice through in the same way, besides countless  
dippings into both. I have never succeeded, and  
I have more than once failed, in reading Boswell  
through on the same plan.

This however may be my fault, not Boswell's :  
and I am sure that there is not a page of him  
that I have not read, and that often, with delight.  
For he had, and he revealed to the others, the  
secret of this kind of biography. And he had it,  
if not so much as Lockhart (who seems to me the  
prince of all biographers, past, present, and to  
come) much more than any of those others, though  
they had it too. This secret consists in fixing the  
attention of the reader, even if it be unconsciously,  
at once on the character of the subject ; and, so  
far as possible, never giving a touch afterwards  
which does not in some way fill out and fill up  
that character. The satire poured on Bozzy's  
minuteness by Wolcot and others is often (in  
Peter Pindar himself at least) admirably good fun,  
and not always quite unjust from certain points of  
view.\* And yet if we pause and with hand on

\* As *Bozzy and Piozzi* has been twice praised, here and in the  
Essay on *Twenty years of Political Satire*, it may be well to give a



heart ask ourselves, "Is the most trivial of these trivialities really superfluous?" it will be GREAT  
BIOGRAPHIES. very difficult to answer in the affirmative. There is hardly one incident, there is hardly one saying of Johnson's, there is even hardly one of those astounding platitudes or sillinesses of Boszy's own which support the "zany" theory, that does not in some subtle and cunning fashion elaborate and furnish forth that extraordinary personality which some will have to be the most faithful portraiture of a human being that we possess in books, and others the most astonishing example of an *eidolon* heightened and transcendentalised by art. I have no doubt that much of Boswell's attraction for the extreme Boswellians consists in what his earliest thorough-going defender would have called his "marine-stores" of detail about

brief specimen of its method, for it is not, I suspect, in all hands. Perhaps the best passage of all is the version of Boswell's wonderful account of his conduct to the Duchess of Argyle in her own house, but it is rather long. The following may be better :

" With glee the Doctor did my girl behold,  
Her name Veronica, just four months old,  
This name Veronica, a name though quaint,  
Belonged originally to a saint ;  
But to my old great-grandam it was given,  
As fine a woman as e'er went to Heaven ;  
And what must add to her importance much,  
The Lady's genealogy was Dutch.  
The man who did espouse this Dame divine,  
Was Alexander, Earl of Kincardine ;  
Who poured along my body, like a sluice,  
The noble, noble, noble blood of Bruce :  
And who that owned this blood could well refuse  
To make the world acquainted with the *news*? &c., &c., &c.

all sorts of things and persons besides Johnson.

GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. No one except Horace Walpole has given us such a collection of *ana in excelsis*, of miscellanies miscellanied into quintessence, as Boswell; and Horace lacks the central tie-beams that Bozzy provides. For yet once more it must be said that in Boswell the whole has a tendency and an aim,—a tendency which reaches its end, an aim which is hit by the archer. It is in this that the supremacy of Boswell's art consists. Apparently desultory, he is never really so; apparently sucking in everything and disgorging everything by turns with the indiscriminating action of a whirlpool, he is really subjecting the whole to a cunning chemical process.

How different the process, or at least how different the success is in the case of the bad and even of the less good biographies the memory, full of fright, of many a double-volumed night shall easily tell us. In the selection and editing of documents and in the construction of linking narrative we shall find better models among the biographers referred to than Boswell. But we shall nowhere find a better—I am not quite sure that we shall anywhere find one so good—in this central requirement of always keeping the character of the subject before the reader, and building up the notion of it with here a little and there a little of successive detail and touch. It may be that Bozzy had so steeped himself in his hero that he at last thought and saw all things in Johnson;

and that everything extraneous to that subject naturally dropped off and became un-  
important to him. But this would be GREAT  
BIOGRAPHIES.  
only a scientific, not a critical, explanation of the fact : and the fact itself remains. Now the very last thing that we find in the average modern biographer is this omnipresence of the subject in its quiddity. The biographer may be earnestly, even tediously, desirous to put a certain side or what he thinks a certain side, of his subject before us. But "the whole," as Empedocles (not Mr Arnold's but the man himself) said, "few boast to find." We turn over pages of surplusage, pages of repetition, pages of triviality ; but the central idea and personality of the man, the idea that disengages itself, once for all and unmistakably, from the pages of Boswell, we are either altogether baffled in seeking, or have to piece and patch out laboriously for ourselves. There may be amusing stories about the subject, or about other people : there may be meritorious bursts of original writing from the author or editor ; but the central idea, the central tie-beam, is too often wanting. There is no composition, and therefore there is no art. In Boswell there is this composition, though it is of a very peculiar and perhaps a not easily imitable kind.

The next book in chronological order, Moore's *Byron*, has very different lessons to teach. It must of course be judged in the first place with a most unusual amount of allowance. The mere circumstances of the antecedent destruction of the



Memoirs imposed upon Moore such a necessity of dancing in fetters that probably, GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. if poverty, and perhaps a little vanity combined, had not dictated to will, he never would have consented to undertake the exercise. He wrote too soon after Byron's death not to have been, even if this most harassing condition had been absent, encumbered by innumerable considerations of this person's feelings, of what that person had written, of what the moral British public still thought, of what the enthusiastic British public still felt. Frequent as are Byron's own laudations of Moore's attitude towards "the great," and creditable as on the whole that attitude must be pronounced to have been, Moore suffered under various personal disabilities in grappling with his task. He was an Irishman writing of English society; a somewhat irregularly educated Irishman dealing with English public-school and university education; a Whig writing of a period of almost unbroken Tory rule; a reformed Thomas Little writing of a very unreformed Don Juan. But he was a man of thorough literary faculty, and literary faculty (which is a branch of wisdom) is, like wisdom, justified of her children in all ways and at all seasons. He had, in those letters and other documents of Byron's which had escaped the flames, illustrative matter of unsurpassed interest: for there is a practical agreement between the admirers and the depreciators of Byron's poetry, that his prose letters are of the very best in their

kind. Moore had, moreover, a central subject which, if not of the least enigmatic, GREAT  
BIOGRAPHIES. was intensely individual, and concerning which the intensest curiosity was entertained by his readers. With a man of the great literary faculty already mentioned this conflict of drawbacks and advantages was certain to produce something notable.

The book is indeed full of faults, all of which (with some things which are not faults at all) may be found censured in his most florid style by Wilson in the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*. It was a mistake, at least as obvious as the reason for it, to be excessively reticent as to the poet's English freaks and unnecessarily loquacious as to his Italian dissipations. It was a worse mistake to drop the pen of the biographer now and then, and thump the cushion of the preacher, an exercise which suited the genial Thomas uncommonly ill. It was a still more unwise extension of that mistake to indulge in abstract discussions about education, marriage, and what not, for which Moore (who was one of the worst hands in the world at abstract dissertation) was very badly equipped, and which, if they had been handled by a combination of Solomon and Berkeley, would still have been out of place in the particular book. It would be quite easy to pick other and minor faults all through.

But who that reads the book with heart's as well as mind's eye cares to do any such thing? Here too we have the main and principal thing,

which was in this case to let the subject speak  
GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. for himself. One of the more legitimate faults which may be found with Moore is that he has not "edited" quite enough, that he has frequently allowed Byron (who like most letter-writers from foreign parts necessarily had to repeat himself to his various correspondents) to appear in the book as tautologous to a rather unjust extent. But even in this there is justification for the biographer. He knew, being a man of letters and a great man of letters, that what was wanted was precisely this,—to let Byron speak for himself. There had been endless speaking *about* him.

God's great gift of speech abused  
Made the memory confused

of almost everybody on the subject. Moore had been prevented from giving full liberty of speech to his client even in this instance; so, like a judicious advocate he gave the fullest liberty that he could in the matter left to him. At any rate he too earns the meed due to the thorough painting of the portrait, the finished construction of the character. We have had all manner of "real Lord Byrons" and of false Lord Byrons since; we have had things that Moore might have told us had he chosen and been free to speak, and things that he was too sensible to tell however free his tongue had been. But it may be safely said that nothing that can ever



come out will be incompatible with the Lord Byron made known to us by Moore. GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. He is done, like Pantagruel, *dans son naturel*; and the natural or unnatural additions will be found to answer thereto.

Far different again is this procedure from that of the ordinary biographer. He copies Moore in giving us much unnecessary matter; he copies him in giving us far more unnecessary comment. The only things he does not copy him in are the excuses for these two faults, and the merit which, were they far greater, would redeem them.

The next example seems to me, as I have already said, to be the capital example of the kind. It is true that Lockhart had everything in his favour. He had ample material; he had complete knowledge of it; he had a real affection for his subject; he had nothing to conceal; he had, if not the same sort of personal curiosity, half-genuine, half-morbid, which Moore had to cater for in the case of Byron, a general interest in his hero which has seldom been equalled and never exceeded. But in literature, as in other games, it is not sufficient to have cards; you must know how to play them. Lockhart played his admirable cards to even greater admiration. His play has indeed been subjected to tests that may be called hardly fair. The recent publication, first of Scott's complete *Diary*, and then of a large additional collection of his *Letters*, was such a test; and it is not necessary to

dwell much on the triumphant fashion in which  
 GREAT Lockhart emerged from it. Except  
 BIOGRAPHIES. a very little which for divers reasons  
 he could not have published, and a very little  
 more which on the whole it was better taste  
 for him not to publish, there may be said to  
 have been absolutely nothing of interest or im-  
 portance in the complete *Diary* which he had  
 not given in his extracts. We had more in  
 bulk, but we had nothing new in kind. We  
 learnt nothing, and there was no fear of our  
 learning anything, derogatory to Sir Walter and  
 hitherto concealed; but we learnt also nothing  
 favourable to him that had, either by maladroitness  
 or bad faith, been held back. Some of the new  
 matter was painful; almost all of it was superfluous.

Of the *Letters*, no doubt this could not be  
 said. The additions they made to our know-  
 ledge were always interesting, sometimes intensely  
 so. But whatever their degree of importance, it  
 was always easy to see why Lockhart had not  
 given them, and seldom possible to refuse approval  
 to his holding of them back. What is proper  
 enough to be known sixty years after a man's  
 death is often improper to be known on the  
 morrow of it. Yet perhaps few men in Lockhart's  
 position, well knowing the unjust aspersions which  
 had been cast on his action in the Scott-Christie  
 duel, would have had the combined good taste  
 and self-denial not to publish the acquittal, by  
 an authority from which there could be no appeal,

the Duke of Wellington, which these unpublished letters contain.

GREAT

BIOGRAPHIES.

But only they of little faith or little intelligence can have been much surprised or greatly relieved by this passage of Lockhart's through the ordeal. To any really good literary judge the thing was certain beforehand. This *Life* had the "certain vital marks." I am aware of course that, putting entirely aside the usual vague and intangible prejudice against Lockhart, some good and well-disposed judges have expressed themselves as not wholly satisfied with parts of his treatment—have considered him unfair to Constable and the Ballantynes and so forth. But the elaborate justification of Constable which was published some years ago left on my mind no feeling that Lockhart had treated him unfairly; and those who disapprove of the treatment of the Ballantynes usually incriminate not the *Life* itself, but divers side controversies and appendices with which we have here nothing to do. What we have to do with is the presentation of the life and conversation of a great man on a great scale; and that this has never been done better I am sure, that it ever will be done better I find great difficulty in believing. The special point of the work is the unmatched combination of excellence in the selection and editing with excellence in the connecting narrative. Boswell's matter is delightful, and excellently arranged for his purpose. But whenever he becomes at all original he becomes (were it not for



the pleasingness of his coxcombry and its advantages as a set-off) a bore. Moore's GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. dissertations are sometimes superfluous, and not always intrinsically very sound. In the examples to be noticed later Carlyle's monologue, as was his wont, has sometimes a habit of submerging Sterling; and the biographer is altogether so much greater a man than his subject, that there is an occasional sense of incongruity. Sir George Trevelyan, whose relation to his hero may be said to have been very similar to that of Lockhart to Scott, and who, like Lockhart, was fortunate in possessing abundant material, sometimes seems to have found himself a little cramped by the relationship, and nowhere seems to me to have attained the full and equable command both of his pen and his subject which is so remarkable in his predecessor.

It is in this full and equable command both of his materials and his own arrangement of them that Lockhart's unique excellence consists. He had to deal with an almost faultless subject,—for there is absolutely no stain on Scott's memory except his clandestine tradings with the Ballantynes, where it is evident that some strange delusion held him from the first as to the distinctly unprofessional, nay as to the questionably honest, character of these relations. There was therefore a not inconsiderable danger that he should present (as so many biographers have presented to us) a faultless monster, or should busy himself in tedious

endeavours to whitewash small faults into positive virtues. The best evidence that he GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. has not done this is the almost incredible but actual fact that there have been people, both at the time and since, who have thought him unfair to Scott. The truth of course is that he has contrived with consummate art to let the character of his hero show itself as good but not in the least goody, as heroic but not in the least theatrical. Yet another distinguishing grace of this great book,—“the best book in the world” as a person who was not ignorant of the other best books in the world once called it to me—is the singular skill with which the author, while never obtruding, never obtrusively effaces himself. He is often actually on the scene: he is constantly speaking in his own person; and yet we never think of him as the man with the pointing-stick at the panorama, as the beadle at the function, as the ring-master of the show. He seems to stand rather in the relation of the epic poet to his characters, narrating, omnipresent, but never in the way.

No other biographer, I repeat, seems to me to have reached quite this pitch of art. It is true that Bozzy plays monkey to his master's bear in a very diverting and effective manner; but still the relation may always be stigmatised by foes, and must sometimes be admitted even by friends, as that of bear and monkey, a contrast diverting and effective, but almost too violent for the best art. There is nothing of this in the *Life of Scott*. Whether

Scott is speaking for himself in the autobiography, the diary, and the letters ; or whether  
GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. Lockhart is speaking of and for him, the presentation is continuous, uniform, uninterrupted. Two phrases, often foolishly used but in their original meaning not only harmless but excellent, may be used in that original meaning of this book. It is "as interesting as a novel," and it is "as good as a play." That is (to translate these artless words into more elaborate phraseology), it has the uniform grasp, the sustained and absorbing attraction, of the best works of narrative and dramatic art. It is easy to say that this is due to the subject, that "all depends on the subject," and that here the subject is matchless. I think this can, as it happens, be rather crushingly rebutted by instance. I do not think that the appreciation of Moore above quoted is grudging. But let any one who knows the two books well ask himself soberly what Moore would have made of Scott, and what Lockhart would have made of Byron. As for the ordinary biographer it is perhaps too heartrending to think what he could have made, if he had given his mind to it, of either. Let any one who knows remember what Lord John Russell made of Moore himself, a subject not of course of the same interest as Scott or Byron, but of interest much above the common ; let him remember much more recent instances of even more promising matter, treated by hardly less approved artists, and what came of them. Then,



if he does not bless Lockhart and award the crown to him, I have nothing more to say but to repeat that I for my part know no GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. book of the kind equal to this.

Here then we have something like the type and standard example of the elaborate biography of the composite kind, the kind which not stinting itself of any one possible sizing allowable to the biographer, admitting great portions of original matter, and permitting the subject to a great extent to illustrate himself, keeps a perpetual regulating hand on these materials, adjusts the connecting links of narrative and comment to one consistent plan of exposition, and so presents the subject "in the round," on all sides, in all lights, doing this not merely by ingenious management in the original part, but by severe and masterly selection in that which is not original. It has been rumoured from time to time that in addition to the *Diary* and even to the additional *Letters*, further instalments of the Abbotsford papers are to be given to the public. They can hardly be otherwise than welcome in themselves, though it seems idle to wish for the pinched-off clay, the marble chips, the bronze filings when you have the sculptor's finished statue. But after the crucial example of the *Diary* itself, I think it may be taken for granted that the results will be uniform whatever is published. We shall have no lower, but also no really fuller idea of Scott; and we shall have a higher idea of what Lockhart gave and did, by beholding

what he deliberately refrained from doing and giving.

GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. The next in order of our books is in a certain way the greatest, as in a certain other way the smallest, of all. But I do not think that the superlative belongs to it as a biography. Of its merits as a book there can be no question, and there never has been any with competent judges. It has sometimes indeed been thought the very best of Carlyle's books, or second only to *The French Revolution*. Its modest length kept the author from the voluminous digressions which beset him so easily; the frequent changes of scene, and the constant necessity for making more or less brief reference to distinguished or interesting persons, excited and fed his unrivalled power of description and characterisation to an extraordinary degree. The sense of battle (for the book begins, if it does not go on, as a polemic against Hare's view of Sterling) gave zest and spirit to the performance. And there can be little doubt that personal memories and affections helped likewise.

The result is astonishingly happy. It is brief enough to be read at a moderate stretch; and for my part, often as I have read it, I have seldom been able to begin it again or even to consult it for a casual reference, without following it right through. Although full enough of the author's characteristic manner, it does not show his mannerism at anything like its furthest.

The preaching is necessarily subdued : it is administered dramatically and in short GREAT doses. The whole is an inculcation of BIOGRAPHIES. Carlylism no doubt ; but it is effected by object-lessons, and with swift and variegated change of scene and character. The famous chapter on Coleridge (admittedly the masterpiece of the book if not of the author) is only the best of infinite good things. The Welsh sketches ; the remarks on Cambridge and Sterling's friends there ; the ingenious economy of the Torrijos episode, where the hapless expedition gets its full share of celebration and Sterling's own not exactly heroic part in it is skimmed without any dishonesty but with consummate art ; the scores of portrait vignettes scattered about, and the admirable composition of all these things, make up such a book as few that the world's libraries contain.

Such a book ; but such a biography ? Here I am not so sure. You can of course "see" Sterling plainly enough in it : but you hardly see what others must have seen. To his friends and relations he was no doubt dear ; perhaps not the less dear, as women often and men sometimes are, for his weaknesses physical and mental. I should be sorry to hurt any one's feelings in speaking of his personality : and it must be distinctly understood that it is of Carlyle's Sterling, not of Sterling himself, that I speak. That he was, apparently, the first of all such as cannot "make up their minds to be damned" (in his biographer's words



of another person of somewhat sturdier sub-  
GREAT stance) and yet want better bread than  
BIOGRAPHIES. is made of wheat by virtue of which  
they may be saved,—the father of all the deplor-  
able family that includes the Arthur Cloughs of  
real life and the Robert Elsmere of fiction—the  
conductor and coryphæus of the caitiff choir who  
sing undogmatic anthems to a Nehushtan of nega-  
tion—should not perhaps count too much against  
him. And no wise man will bear too hardly on  
the fact of his having turned his back on a certain  
troublesome and probably dangerous business,  
to which he had put his hand, in order to dry  
the tears of a “blooming young lady with black  
eyes.” But it is too evident that Sterling, his  
physical health no doubt aggravating his meta-  
physical complaints, was not a strong man, amiable  
and not ungifted, but with no great originality in  
him, and without a very great capacity for taking  
trouble in order to make up for the lack of  
originality. Very fortunate indeed was it for  
him that he was called upon to play no other  
part than that of an affluent scholarly invalid, and  
that he died before youth had quite departed,  
and therefore before his weakness had ceased to  
be pathetic and begun to be painful to his  
friends.

This is a brutal reduction to plain prose of  
Carlyle’s portrait of him. But the mere fact  
that it will seem brutal shows on the one hand  
how skilful the painter is, and on the other that

the merits of his picture are the merits not of biography—that is to say the presentation of a man as he is—but of romance, <sup>GREAT BIOGRAPHIES.</sup> or the presentation of something as it is not. All through the book Carlyle plays Socrates to this poor friend of his (with very little fight in him at any time and with none left now) and protects him from the onset of the enemy. That he sometimes effects the rescue by concentrating our attention on himself, is part of the recognised procedure in such cases. But it is by no means always thus that he champions Sterling. I have not the slightest doubt that the variety and brilliancy of the scene-painting, the divergences into side portraits, and all the other purple patches referred to above, had a more or less conscious purpose of avoiding the concentration of too much attention on the reader's part on the nominal hero. The result no doubt is in a way triumphantly successful. The book has practically founded an immortal Sterling Club; there will always be voices to sing *Tu Marcellus eras* in honour of Sterling; and I protest that I am rather ashamed of myself for having said what I believe to be the truth about him just now. Nor can it be said that the biographer may not smooth a little and apologise a good deal; especially where, as in Sterling's case, the faults are only weaknesses and wants. But still if the standard of biography which has been set up earlier is at all a true one, Sterling never could have furnished a subject

for one of the very best of biographies as such.

GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. There was simply not enough substance in him for one. And we shall accordingly find that what Carlyle with wonderful art has done is to reverse the tricks of the conjurers, and lead us to believe that we are reading a life of Sterling while Sterling is really "vanished," and we are actually reading an extraordinarily interesting history of the places that he lived in, the men he knew, the actions which he shared or did not share, and the personality of his redoubtable and admirable friend and biographer, all thrown up on a background of the shortcomings of the Church and State of England in the nineteenth century.

No two books could in this respect stand in much greater contrast to each other than the *Sterling* and Sir George Trevelyan's *Life and Letters of Macaulay*. The requirements of this last were entirely different: they were met with a just consciousness of their difference, and the result is a success of a perfectly different kind. Macaulay is still a difficult subject to handle. He had grave faults as a writer and some foibles as a man, accompanying great merits as a man and greater gifts as a writer. By an almost unexampled coincidence he has been depreciated by some in a manner which makes others forgive him where he ought not to be forgiven; and he has been admired by some in a way which makes others unduly shy of admiring him. But this applies to his writing chiefly. Speaking under



correction, I should say that for some fifteen years after his death, the ideas of him among GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. those who had not known him personally were pretty uniform, and not much more unfavourable among those who rather disliked his writings than among those who admired them. That is to say, he was thought of as an undoubtedly clever, a very generous, and an entirely honourable man, who had retained the faults of a clever and precocious boy,—“cocksureness,” inordinate loquacity, intolerance of fair give-and-take in conversation to a hardly tolerable degree,—a man whose “rough, pistolling ways” extended from literature into life, who was not too scrupulous about carrying personal and political antipathies into his writings, and who was not only “cocksure” but also cock-a-hoop to a degree barely if at all excusable.

And I think it is also not too much to say that Sir George Trevelyan’s biography changed this almost at once, changed it even for some who were rather prejudiced against Macaulay, and made it almost impossible for any future generation which takes the trouble to acquaint itself with him at all to entertain that notion of him which Lord Melbourne’s *mot*, the Windsor Castle incident, and a few other things had helped his writings to establish in the minds of the generation before. For it is, I venture to think, one of Sir George’s amiable mistakes (of which there are a few in the book) to think that Macaulay’s writings

“give us no more idea of the author than Shakespeare’s do.” I should say myself that GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. they give a very decided though, as it happens, a very false or at any rate a very incomplete idea of him. There is scarcely a page of the *Essays* or the *History* in which we do not seem to see a man of unquestionable knowledge and of equally unquestionable power, with no small range of sympathy and taste, but with a huge pair of blinkers on for everything and everybody with whom or with which he is not in sympathy, positive to or beyond the verge of arrogance, ready to pronounce and perhaps even to think everyone who does not agree with him a fool or a knave or an egregious combination of both, never quite dishonest, but often quite unjust, with little real geniality even in his appreciation of humour, and with little real sympathy even in his appreciation of sentiment.

I do not know whether the family tradition was too strong in Sir George for him even to be aware of this notion of his uncle, which certainly existed at the time he wrote in persons neither infantine nor ill-blooded nor ill-informed. But he could have taken no happier way to substitute something better and juster for it than the way he actually took. He is sincerely, even desperately, loyal to “the bluid of McAulay.” With Mr Napier I am unable to see that Johnson, who was very frequently in the wrong, was wrong at all when he smote the Reverend Kenneth and the Reverend

John for speaking unadvisedly with their lips. But Sir George, the faithful, is sure GREAT that he was wrong ; and of this fidelity BIOGRAPHIES. there are many other odd examples in the book. The very preface, however, to the second edition shows that, despite this amiable weakness, he had the root of the biographical matter in him. "It was my business," says he, "to show my uncle as he was, and not as I or any one else would have had him." "Oh brave we!" as Johnson himself might have said. Not of course that the principle extends to publishing *tacenda* of any kind. There are things which are not disgraceful to a man to have done or written, but of which the publication is obviously unfair to him, which any biographer may suppress, and which in some notable later examples of biography have not been suppressed—to the discredit of the subject in the minds of fools, of the biographer in the minds of the wise.

But to quote, or rather to paraphrase Sir George again, if a faithful picture of the subject cannot be drawn without injuring his memory, let the drawing alone ; if the drawing be undertaken, let it be faithful. Consider what would have happened if Sir George had set himself to cut away all the early and later priggishness, all the evidences of extreme partisanship in the Croker and other matters, if he had given us a Macaulay all family affection, all sweet reasonableness, all pathetic humanity, a trimmed, shorn, and varnished Macaulay. We should have revolted, we should



have said that this was absurd: and we should  
GREAT have liked Macaulay even less than  
BIOGRAPHIES. before, and had a strong suspicion that  
Sir George was a garbler and a humbug. Whereas,  
by giving the rough with the smooth, and letting  
the man exhibit himself as he actually was, yet  
with no treacherous or unfair revelation, the revolution of opinion in the minds of some, the establishment once for all of a good opinion in those of others, was done and done thoroughly, so that it will never need to be done again and may defy not merely the critic but also the indiscreet busybody.

If anybody says that by much comparison of instances I have made clear two *secrets de Polichinelle*, first that the life of a man should give us the man and his life and not a collection of dead and inhuman things, secondly that a good life of a man will be found to have been well done itself, and done probably in a rather different way from any other, I bow to the remark. It is more and more becoming clear to me that the only secrets much worth finding out are *secrets de Polichinelle*, things already known to all the world. To convince yourself of the obvious, neither to fail to see it for mere blindness like the fools, nor to fail to see it because of elaborate and persistent turning away from it like the clever ones, is certainly in these days, and perhaps has been in all, a very important and by no means an extremely simple task. Yet it may be pleaded that if the secret of writing

biographies is known to all the world, no small number of persons in that world (to <sup>GREAT</sup> wit, the writers of biographies) seem <sup>BIOGRAPHIES.</sup> to be for the most part absolutely guiltless of the knowledge. And yet "Lives" are being more and more written. In the notes to his translation of Heine's *Deutschland* Mr Leland informs us that "in one of the best-known minor libraries in Europe" he "found two lives of a distinguished English poet and not a line of his works." It is entirely conceivable; it would not surprise me very much if he had said that he knew an author who had written one of the lives without having read a line of the works. Such things have happened, and are happening. But still, things being so, it might be supposed that the books for which there is such a demand would be supplied good. That would be a gross and grievous mistake. Demand may create supply; it certainly does not necessarily create good supply.

The examples I have taken are pretty well spread over the century (or rather less) in which they all appeared; and though the latest of them made its appearance so to speak yesterday, it is less satisfactory to remember that the subject of that life was born nearly at its beginning, and died within the artificial period which has been laid down in the title of this book. It is quite possible that the materials for biography are not so promising as they used to be. Some persons pretend that the cry about the decay of letter-writing is nonsense.

The cautious arguer will confine himself to replying that at any rate there are GREAT BIOGRAPHIES. great temptations not to write letters. Telegrams, post-cards, correspondence-cards, letter-cards,—all of these things the truly good and wise detest and execrate; it is not quite so certain that they abstain from them. I believe that the habit of keeping a diary has really gone out to a great extent. Too often moreover nowadays the unauthorised person steps in with his privateering before the authorised person is ready for sea; and then the authorised person too often indulges in undignified chasings and cannonadings of his predecessor. Above all there seems to have been lost, in this and other things, the all-important sense of proportion in books, and we get *Lives* that would have been excellent in one volume watered out into two, *Lives* that would have been pleasant places in two, becoming pathless deserts in four. These things have had a bad effect on the class of persons who are likely to find biographers. One hears of their destroying materials with a “Please God, nobody shall deal with *me* as——dealt with——.” Or else, as was the case with Cardinal Newman, they enjoin a method of dealing with their materials, which, though it permits any one of tolerable intelligence to construct a biography for himself with comparatively little difficulty, does not give him the biography actually made. For it cannot be too often repeated that a real biography ought to be something more



than the presentation of mere materials, however excellently calendared, something more GREAT than Memoirs, Letters, Diary and so BIOGRAPHIES. forth. The whole ought to be passed through the mind of a competent and intelligent artist, and to be presented to us, not indeed in such a way that we are bound to take his word for the details, but in such a way that we see a finished picture, a real composition, not merely a bundle of details and *data*.

## APPENDIX A.

### COLERIDGE AND SOUTHEY.

I HAVE in the text expressed my opinion that Southey was, perhaps, a little too didactic in his dealings with Coleridge. But it must be remembered that the roundest and most uncompromising denunciation of Coleridge that we have comes from Wordsworth, not Southey ; and I cannot help thinking that the late Mr Dykes Campbell, inestimable as are his dealings with the Lake set, and little as any one who knew him is likely to feel disposed to quarrel with him, was rather unfair to Southey, whom he accused of “meddlesomeness” in bringing on the marriage of Coleridge and Sara, and of whose letter to Mrs Hughes on the occasion of Coleridge’s death he speaks severely. I should like to examine these two points a little. For the modern memory is rather short, and the modern judgment rather too apt to take things at second-hand : and I have seen this “meddlesomeness” recently taken as a thing proved and granted, by reviewers and others.

Let us then take it first. The facts are not in dispute. Coleridge, after engaging himself to Miss Fricker, took one of his fits of abscondence, left Cambridge, went to London, and abode there smoking and being smoked with Lamb at the *Salutation and Cat*, but giving no sign

of life to his fiancée and his Bristol friends. Southey, visiting town either specially or for other purposes, sought him out, brought him back, and so it was that there was a *redintegratio amoris* and a marriage. Surely it is going not a little far to call this "meddlesomeness." Southey had been Miss Fricker's friend from childhood ; he had himself introduced Coleridge to her ; he was going to marry her sister ; and it does not appear that she had any male relatives to act for her. Would any gentleman not have done what he did ? Let it be remembered, too, that, after all, he could not simply tuck Coleridge under his arm and drag him to the altar ; that no compulsion appears to have been required ; that Coleridge was at least as much in love with his pensive Sara, both before and for some time after marriage, as it was in his nature to be ; and that Southey, himself a very young man, had had no time as yet to become acquainted with the hopeless vacillation and instability of his future brother-in-law's character. He did the duty next him ; well would it be for most men if they had nothing to reproach themselves with but that.

And now as to the letter to Mrs Hughes. "What he wrote," said Mr Campbell, "is better forgotten." What *did* he write ? That Coleridge "Had long been dead to me, but his decease has naturally wakened up old recollections." That "Whosoever edits his letters will have a difficult and delicate task" (*cf.* Mr Ernest Coleridge's preface to these letters, and not all of them, sixty years later) ; that "all of his blood were in the highest degree proud of his reputation, but this was their only feeling concerning him" ; that "Hartley has far greater powers than anyone who *now* bears the same name." This is absolutely all, and it will be observed that Southey does



not as a matter of fact express any personal opinion whatever of an unfavourable kind, though, no doubt, he may be thought to guard himself rather carefully against expressing a favourable one except in point of "genius." There might have been a little more sentiment, perhaps; but Southey was not a sentimentalist, and the simple phrase "wakened up old recollections" from him means more than pages of regret and remorse would have meant from Coleridge's own pen. There is no doubt some evidence of the "natural death of love." Coleridge had wearied Southey out as he wearied out his family, Wordsworth, Wedgwood, everybody with whom he had to do—except people like the Morgans and the Gillmans, who were sufficiently below him in intellectual rank to think it an honour as well as a charity to dry-nurse him—as he once at least was close to wearying out the angelic goodness, the humorous tolerance, and the rock-fast friendship of Charles Lamb himself. Now Southey was not quite an angel, and tolerance was not his strong point: but nothing worse than this need, I am convinced, be said of his relations with the "archangel a little damaged," to whose forsaken family he was a father.

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## APPENDIX B.

## SONGS OF THE CRIMEAN WAR.

A RATHER curious and interesting paper, which would not badly illustrate the difficulty, more than once pointed at in the text, of making out any strict connection between opportunity and performance in the matter of War Songs, might be written on those of the Crimean War. It is, of course, true that "The Charge of the Light Brigade," one of the capital things of our literature in this kind, owes its inspiration to the subject; and that indirectly it is responsible for a good deal of not the least powerful part of *Maud*. But when we have allowed for these, and for the strictly bellicose parts of Sydney Dobell's *England in time of War*, we have pretty well exhausted the very notable things to which the one great war in which England has been engaged for eighty years, gave birth. Archbishop Trench's "Alma" is estimable but hardly great; the other War Poems which Dobell's coadjutor Alexander Smith, the resipiscent Chartist Ernest Jones, and others produced, deserve no stronger epithet.

The truth is that, here as elsewhere, the reverse of Borrow's dictum about beer applies to poetry. "The goodness of ale," quoth he, "depends less upon who brews it than upon what it is brewed of." I am not quite certain even of this: but it is certain that the goodness of poetry depends much less on the matter of the song than on the gifts of the singer. And in this case Tennyson was the only great English singer whom

the war found ready. The subject does not seem to have inspired Browning ; it was not very likely to inspire Mr Arnold ; Kingsley, who might have sung nobly on it, had already turned from poetry to prose. In fact the war exactly coincided with the interval in English verse, between the undisputed establishment of the power of Tennyson and Browning, and the rise of the second Victorian—the first purely Victorian—school with Mr William Morris. Only the “Spasmodics” occupied the field, and the Spasmodics, as has been said, did what they could.

But if the enquirer goes still further and says, “Yes ; but why did not the Crimean war develop its Campbell, in addition to Tennyson, who was a universal not a specialist singer?” then no answer can be given except that, as a matter of fact, it did not, and there’s an end on’t. Even its unsatisfactory character in many ways will give us no help ; for if there was blundering there was no disgrace, and it is only disgrace that seals the singer’s lips. The hour had come, but the men had not ; and that is the conclusion of the whole matter.





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